PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 390

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
19 September 2002—17 October 2002

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HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR, MP, JUNE 2001)

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24 September 2002

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 390**

TWENTY-FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Tuesday 24 September 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock, notice having been given by MR. SPEAKER, pursuant to Standing Order No. 13 (Earlier meeting of the House in certain circumstances).

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Speaker: Statement by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order on procedure, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take points of order after the statement.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Mr. Speaker, thank you for recalling Parliament to debate the best way to deal with the issue of the present leadership of Iraq and weapons of mass destruction.

Today we published a 50-page dossier, detailing the history of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme, its breach of United Nations resolutions, and its attempts to rebuild that illegal programme. I have placed a copy in the Library.

At the end of the Gulf war, the full extent of Saddam's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programmes became clear. As a result, the United Nations passed a series of resolutions, demanding that Iraq disarm itself of such weapons and establishing a regime of weapons inspections and monitoring to do the task. The inspectors were to be given unconditional and unrestricted access to all and any Iraqi sites.

All this is accepted fact. In addition, it is fact, documented by UN inspectors, that Iraq almost immediately began to obstruct the inspections. Visits were delayed; on occasions, inspectors threatened; matériel was moved; special sites, shut to the inspectors, were unilaterally designated by Iraq. The work of the inspectors continued, but against a background of increasing obstruction and non-compliance. Indeed, Iraq denied that its biological weapons programme existed until forced to acknowledge it after high-ranking defectors disclosed its existence in 1995.

Eventually, in 1997, the UN inspectors declared that they were unable to fulfil their task. A year of negotiation and further obstruction occurred until finally, in late 1998, the UN team was forced to withdraw.

As the dossier sets out, we estimate on the basis of the UN's work that there were up to 360 tonnes of bulk chemical warfare agents, including 1.5 tonnes of VX nerve agent; up to 3,000 tonnes of precursor chemicals; growth media sufficient to produce 26,000 litres of anthrax spores; and over 30,000 special munitions for delivery of chemical and biological agents. All of this was missing and unaccounted for.

Military action by the United States and United Kingdom followed and a certain amount of infrastructure for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and missile capability was destroyed, setting the Iraqi programme back, but not ending it.

From late 1998 onwards, therefore, the sole inhibition on Saddam's WMD programme was the sanctions regime. Iraq was forbidden to use the revenue from its oil except for certain specified non-military purposes. The sanctions regime, however, was also subject to illegal trading and abuse. Because of concerns about its inadequacy—and the impact on the Iraqi people—we made several attempts to refine it, culminating in a new UN resolution in May of this year. But it was only partially effective. Around $3 billion of money is illegally taken by Saddam every year now, double the figure for the year 2000. Self-evidently, there is no proper accounting for this money.

[The Prime Minister]

Because of concerns that a containment policy based on sanctions alone could not sufficiently inhibit Saddam's weapons programme, negotiations continued, even after 1998, to gain readmission for the UN inspectors. In 1999, a new UN resolution demanding their re-entry was passed and ignored. Further negotiations continued. Finally, after several months of discussion with Saddam's regime, in July this year, Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, concluded that Saddam was not serious about readmitting the inspectors and ended the negotiations.

All this is established fact. I set out the history in some detail because occasionally debate on this issue seems to treat it almost as if it had suddenly arisen, coming out of nowhere on a whim in the last few months of 2002. It is actually an 11-year history: a history of UN will flouted, of lies told by Saddam about the existence of his chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programmes, and of obstruction, defiance and denial.

There is one common, consistent theme, however: the total determination of Saddam to maintain that programme; to risk war, international ostracism, sanctions and the isolation of the Iraqi economy to keep it. At any time, he could have let the inspectors back in and put the world to proof. At any time, he could have co-operated with the United Nations. Ten days ago, he made the offer unconditionally under threat of war. He could have done it at any time in the last 11 years, but he did not. Why?

The dossier that we publish gives the answer. The reason is that his chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programme is not an historic left-over from 1998. The inspectors are not needed to clean up the old remains. His weapons of mass destruction programme is active, detailed and growing. The policy of containment is not working. The weapons of mass destruction programme is not shut down; it is up and running now.

The dossier is based on the work of the British Joint Intelligence Committee. For over 60 years, beginning just before world war two, the JIC has provided intelligence assessments to British Prime Ministers. Normally, its work is obviously secret. Unusually, because it is important that we explain our concerns about Saddam to the British people, we have decided to disclose its assessments.

I am aware, of course, that people will have to take elements of this on the good faith of our intelligence services, but this is what they are telling me, the British Prime Minister, and my senior colleagues. The intelligence picture that they paint is one accumulated over the last four years. It is extensive, detailed and authoritative. It concludes that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons, that Saddam has continued to produce them, that he has existing and active military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, which could be activated within 45 minutes, including against his own Shia population, and that he is actively trying to acquire nuclear weapons capability.

On chemical weapons, the dossier shows that Iraq continues to produce chemical agents for chemical weapons; has rebuilt previously destroyed production plants across Iraq; has bought dual-use chemical facilities; has retained the key personnel formerly engaged in the chemical weapons programme; and has a serious ongoing research programme into weapons production, all of it well funded.

In respect of biological weapons, again, production of biological agents has continued; facilities formerly used for biological weapons have been rebuilt; equipment has been purchased for such a programme; and again, Saddam has retained the personnel who worked on it prior to 1991. In particular, the UN inspection regime discovered that Iraq was trying to acquire mobile biological weapons facilities, which of course are easier to conceal. Present intelligence confirms that it has now got such facilities. The biological agents that we believe Iraq can produce include anthrax, botulinum, toxin, aflatoxin and ricin—all eventually result in excruciatingly painful death.

As for nuclear weapons, Saddam's previous nuclear weapons programme was shut down by the inspectors, following disclosure by defectors of the full, but hidden, nature of it. That programme was based on gas centrifuge uranium enrichment. The known remaining stocks of uranium are now held under supervision by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

But we now know the following: since the departure of the inspectors in 1998, Saddam has bought or attempted to buy specialised vacuum pumps of the design needed for the gas centrifuge cascade to enrich uranium; an entire magnet production line of the specification for use in the motors and top bearings of gas centrifuges; dual-use products, such as anhydrous hydrogen fluoride and fluoride gas, which can be used both in petrochemicals but also in gas centrifuge cascades; a filament winding machine, which can be used to manufacture carbon fibre gas centrifuge rotors; and he has attempted, covertly, to acquire 60,000 or more specialised aluminium tubes, which are subject to strict controls owing to their potential use in the construction of gas centrifuges.

In addition, we know that Saddam has been trying to buy significant quantities of uranium from Africa, although we do not know whether he has been successful. Again, key personnel who used to work on the nuclear weapons programme are back in harness. Iraq may claim that that is for a civil nuclear power programme, but I would point out that it has no nuclear power plants.

So that is the position in respect of the weapons—but of course, the weapons require ballistic missile capability. That, again, is subject to UN resolutions. Iraq is supposed only to have missile capability up to 150 km for conventional weaponry. Pages 27 to 31 of the dossier detail the evidence on that issue. It is clear that a significant number of longer-range missiles were effectively concealed from the previous inspectors and remain, including up to 20 extended-range Scud missiles; that in mid-2001 there was a step change in the programme and, by this year, Iraq's development of weapons with a range of more than 1,000 km was well under way; and that hundreds of people are employed in that programme, facilities are being built and equipment procured—usually clandestinely. Sanctions and import controls have hindered the programme, but only slowed its progress. The capability being developed, incidentally, is for multi-purpose use, including with WMD warheads.

That is the assessment, given to me, of the Joint Intelligence Committee. In addition, we have well founded intelligence to tell us that Saddam sees his WMD programme as vital to his survival and as a demonstration of his power and influence in the region.

There will be some who will dismiss all this. Intelligence is not always right. For some of the material, there might be innocent explanations. There will be others

who say rightly that, for example, on present going, it could be several years before Saddam acquires a usable nuclear weapon—though if he were able to purchase fissile matériel illegally, it would be only a year or two. But let me put it at its simplest: on this 11-year history; with this man Saddam; with this accumulated, detailed intelligence available; with what we know and what we can reasonably speculate, would the world be wise to leave the present situation undisturbed—to say that, despite 14 separate UN demands on the issue, all of which Saddam is in breach of, we should do nothing, and to conclude that we should trust, not to the good faith of the UN weapons inspectors, but to the good faith of the current Iraqi regime? I do not believe that that would be a responsible course to follow.

Our case is simply this: not that we take military action come what may, but that the case for ensuring Iraqi disarmament, as the UN itself has stipulated, is overwhelming. I defy anyone, on the basis of this evidence, to say that that is an unreasonable demand for the international community to make when, after all, it is only the same demand that we have made for 11 years and that Saddam has rejected.

People say, "But why Saddam?" I do not in the least dispute that there are other causes of concern on weapons of mass destruction. I said as much in this House on 14 September last year. However, two things about Saddam stand out. He has used these weapons in Iraq itself—thousands dying in those chemical weapons attacks—and in the Iran-Iraq war, started by him, in which 1 million people died; and his is a regime with no moderate elements to appeal to.

Read the chapter on Saddam and human rights in this dossier. Read not just about the 1 million dead in the war with Iran, not just about the 100,000 Kurds brutally murdered in northern Iraq, not just about the 200,000 Shia Muslims driven from the marshlands in southern Iraq, and not just about the attempt to subjugate and brutalise the Kuwaitis in 1990 that led to the Gulf war. I say, "Read also about the routine butchering of political opponents, the prison 'cleansing' regimes in which thousands die, the torture chambers and the hideous penalties supervised by him and his family and detailed by Amnesty International." Read it all and, again, I defy anyone to say that this cruel and sadistic dictator should be allowed any possibility of getting his hands on chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

"Why now?", people ask. I agree that I cannot say that this month or next, even this year or next, Saddam will use his weapons. But I can say that if the international community, having made the call for disarmament, now, at this moment, at the point of decision, shrugs its shoulders and walks away, he will draw the conclusion that dictators faced with a weakening will always draw: that the international community will talk but not act, will use diplomacy but not force. We know, again from our history, that diplomacy not backed by the threat of force has never worked with dictators and never will.

If we take this course and if we refuse to implement the will of the international community, Saddam will carry on, his efforts will intensify, his confidence will grow and, at some point in a future not too distant, the threat will turn into reality. The threat therefore is not imagined. The history of Saddam and weapons of mass destruction is not American or British propaganda. The history and the present threat are real.

If people say, "Why should Britain care?", I answer, "Because there is no way this man, in this region above all regions, could begin a conflict using such weapons and the consequences not engulf the whole world, including this country." That, after all, is the reason the UN passed its resolutions. That is why it is right that the UN Security Council again makes its will and its unity clear and lays down a strong new UN resolution and mandate. Then Saddam will have the choice: comply willingly or be forced to comply. That is why, alongside the diplomacy, there must be genuine preparedness and planning to take action if diplomacy fails.

Let me be plain about our purpose. Of course there is no doubt that Iraq, the region and the whole world would be better off without Saddam. Iraq deserves to be led by someone who can abide by international law, not a murderous dictator; by someone who can bring Iraq back into the international community where it belongs, not leave it languishing as a pariah; by someone who can make the country rich and successful, not impoverished by Saddam's personal greed; and by someone who can lead a Government more representative of the country as a whole while maintaining absolutely Iraq's territorial integrity.

We have no quarrel with the Iraqi people. Indeed, liberated from Saddam, they could make Iraq prosperous and a force for good in the middle east. So the ending of this regime would be the cause of regret for no one other than Saddam. But our purpose is disarmament. No one wants military conflict. The whole purpose of putting this before the UN is to demonstrate the united determination of the international community to resolve this in the way it should have been resolved years ago: through a proper process of disarmament under the UN. Disarmament of all weapons of mass destruction is the demand. One way or another, it must be acceded to.

There are two other issues with a bearing on this question which I will deal with. First, Afghanistan is a country now freed from the Taliban but still suffering. This is a regime we changed, rightly. I want to make it clear, once again, that we are entirely committed to its reconstruction. We will not desert the Afghan people. We will stick with them until the job of reconstruction is done.

Secondly, I have no doubt that the Arab world knows that it would be better off without Saddam. Equally, I know that there is genuine resentment at the state of the middle east peace process, which people want to see the international community pursue with the same vigour. Israel will defend its people against these savage acts of terrorism, but the very purpose of this terrorism is to prevent any chance for peace. Meanwhile, the Palestinians are suffering in the most appalling and unacceptable way.

We need therefore urgent action to build a security infrastructure that gives both Israelis and Palestinians confidence and stops the next suicide bomb closing down the prospects of progress. We need political reform for the Palestinian Authority, and we need a new conference on the middle east peace process, based on the twin principles of a secure Israel and a viable Palestinian state. We can condemn the terrorism and the reaction to it. As I have said many times in the House, frankly, that gets us nowhere. What we need is a firm commitment to action

[The Prime Minister]

and a massive mobilisation of energy to get the peace process moving again, and we in Britain will play our part in that in any way we can.

Finally, there are many acts of this drama still to be played out. I have always said that Parliament should be kept in touch with all developments, in particular those that would lead us to military action. That remains the case, and to those who doubt it I say: look at Kosovo and Afghanistan. We proceeded with care, with full debate in this House, and when we took military action, we did so as a last resort. We shall act in the same way now, but I hope we can do so secure in the knowledge that should Saddam continue to defy the will of the international community, this House, as it has in our history so many times before, will not shrink from doing what is necessary and what is right.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Let me start by thanking the Prime Minister for providing me with a copy of his statement and the Government dossier in advance of today's debate. I am relieved that this evidence has finally been made public and hope that hon. Members will have time to digest it before taking part in the debate.

Many will want to argue today about the conduct of American foreign policy, the degree of influence that the UK Government have with the Bush Administration, and whether Britain is simply following the United States. That is not, I believe, what this debate should be about in any way. The key question is whether Saddam Hussein has the means, the mentality and the motive to pose a threat to Britain's national security and the wider international order.

As to the means, we know that Saddam used chemical weapons during the 1980s and developed biological weapons at the same time. David Hannay, our former ambassador to the United Nations, has stated openly that Iraq would have been a nuclear power by the mid-1990s had the Gulf war not intervened. The evidence produced in the Government's report shows clearly that Iraq is still pursuing its weapons of mass destruction programme. As the Prime Minister says, the policy of containment is not working. The ex-head of UNSCOM, Richard Butler, said that the UN was unable to destroy Saddam's biological and chemical weapons capabilities.

The Government dossier confirms that Iraq is self-sufficient in biological weapons and that the Iraqi military is ready to deploy those, and chemical weapons, at some 45 minutes' notice. We also know that three years ago Iraq attempted to get enriched uranium from Serbia in the dying days of the Milosevic regime—evidenced and documented. Today, the report says that Iraq has sought to acquire uranium from Africa and is trying to turn it into weapons-grade material. No doubt during this debate some will want to quote the former UN weapons inspector, Scott Ritter, who apparently said last week:

"Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability has been verifiably eliminated".

Let me give them this warning. That was not Mr. Ritter's assessment four years ago when he was inspecting the very sites that he now talks about.

He said then:

"The sad truth is that Iraq today is not disarmed".

It

"has lied to the special commission and the world since day one."

He went on to say:

"This lie has been perpetuated . . . through systematic acts of concealment."

So Saddam has the means. There should be no doubt about his mentality. He has fought a protracted war with Iran costing at least a million lives, gassed his own Kurdish population, persecuted the Marsh Arabs, invaded and occupied Kuwait, and launched missiles against Israel and Saudi Arabia. He has been willing to defy the world order and terrorise and starve his own people in order to continue his weapons programme. He has diverted $3 billion in the last year alone for that very purpose; money that could have gone to feeding his own population.

So the only question remaining is whether Saddam has the motive to strike against Britain, and I believe that it is fair to assume that he has. We have repeatedly supported Security Council resolutions against Iraq, we were a major component of the allied coalition during the Gulf war, and today British forces are still engaged in Iraq policing the no-fly zones to protect Kurds in the north of the country and Shi'ite Muslims in the south.

The report shows that Saddam has illegally retained at least 20 al-Hussein missiles, with a range of 650 km, capable of carrying the various warheads that he needs, and that he is also developing new ones.

I remind the House that there are more than 3,000 British service men and women in Cyprus, 200 in Turkey, 300 in Saudi Arabia and 400 in Kuwait, all of whom are in range of the missiles that Saddam possesses today.

Notwithstanding that evidence, there are still a number of important questions that I should like to ask the Prime Minister.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that any new Security Council resolution must set out the precise terms under which Iraq is to dismantle and destroy its weapons? Will he give a clear timetable for that and an unequivocal declaration that failure to comply will trigger military action?

Given that the Prime Minister has said that Saddam is already in breach of nine existing resolutions, can he confirm the legal advice that he has received and whether we need a new Security Council resolution to take military action under international law?

I am reminded of the words of the Prime Minister's then Foreign Secretary, the current Leader of the House, who, in December 1998, said that we had

"clear backing in UN resolutions"

to take military action against Iraq, and that those resolutions had warned Saddam of

"the severest consequences if he broke his undertakings"

to stop his weapons of mass destruction programme.

Will the Prime Minister also say what resources Britain would be likely to contribute in the event of any military action? Will he tell us what plans the Government are making should Saddam be removed from power, as he indicated earlier, and whom he has met from many of those Iraqi opposition groups that now seek to take Saddam's place?

No one wants to see British troops or any other troops engaged in war. War should be the last resort when all other efforts have failed, but Britain should never shy away from its responsibilities in a time of international crisis. As King Abdullah of Jordan only a few days ago said:

"the decision in the end is that of the Iraqi leadership, they bear the responsibility before their people, nation and the world".

Those who refuse to contemplate military action at any price must ask themselves how we are to force Saddam to comply with UN resolutions that he has flouted for a decade. They must also ask themselves why only now, under the threat of military intervention, has he talked about letting the UN weapons inspectors back.

History is littered with the desire of decent people to give the likes of Saddam Hussein a second chance, but he has had 10 years of second chances. Now, surely, is the time to act. This matter is now in Saddam Hussein's hands.

The Prime Minister: I think that I can reply to the right hon. Gentleman very briefly, and I thank him for the general support that he has given in his response to my statement.

I want to emphasise these points. First, it is important to remember that we do not merely have British service men in that region; our planes and our pilots are involved in policing the no-fly zone the entire time. It is not something that gets into the news every day, but British service men and women are already out in that area performing a vital task in relation to the Iraqi regime.

In respect of the new UN Security Council resolution, its precise terms are obviously a matter of discussion but we should be absolutely clear and unambiguous about what is expected from Saddam and about what will follow if he does not comply. In respect of the legal advice, we do not disclose such advice but, of course, we will always act in accordance with international law.

In respect of any military options, we are not at the stage of deciding those options but, of course, it is important—should we get to that point—that we have the fullest possible discussion of those options and of how we ensure that we enforce the will of the international community. I have not personally seen the opposition Iraqi groups but I know that the Government are in touch with them.

It is worth emphasising that the purpose is the disarmament of Iraq, and that decision—as the right hon. Gentleman mentioned a moment ago—is for Saddam. I do not think, however, that people should be in any doubt or have any illusions about this. The people who would rejoice the most at getting rid of Saddam are the Iraqi people.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): This important opportunity provided by the Prime Minister's statement, the publication of the accompanying dossier and the debate that will follow gives all of us a chance, after the long summer recess, to reflect the legitimate anxieties of our constituents and, in particular, the representations that many of us have received from the Muslim community in this country. This also gives us the opportunity to raise legitimate questions, a number of which have not yet been adequately answered for many of us, either by the Prime Minister's statement or by the dossier.

There is, of course, general consensus that Iraq constitutes a grotesque, amoral regime, and that that must be dealt with. I say to the Prime Minister, however, as I did when I questioned him in the House just before the summer recess, that there are two important issues involving founding principles. The first is the role of the House of Commons. There is no specific proposal before the House today, but, if and when there is one, there must be an absolute, up-front opportunity for the House to vote on any proposal involving the possible use of British forces. In his statement today, the Prime Minister said that the House would be kept fully "in touch". Does "in touch" mean a democratic Division in the Lobby of the House?

The second consideration is the overriding supremacy of the United Nations. In the penultimate paragraph of the preface to the dossier, the Prime Minister states:

"The case I make is that the UN Resolutions demanding he stops his WMD"—

weapons of mass destruction—

"programme are being flouted; that since the inspectors left four years ago he has continued with this programme; that the inspectors must be allowed back in to do their job properly; and that if he refuses, or if he makes it impossible for them to do their job, as he has done in the past, the international community will have to act."

That stands, at least rhetorically, in contrast to some of the recent statements that we have heard, this week alone, from the American Administration.

I do not believe that the Prime Minister has been subject to fair criticism over the intensive international effort that he has made since the events of 11 September, or the efforts that he has made to invest the United Nations with its proper authority. I urge him, however, to continue to resist calls—whether they come from certain people in this country or from others in the United States—for precipitate action. In that context, he is surely right to lay emphasis on the fundamental need to restart the middle east peace process.

Those of us who have never subscribed to British unilateralism are not about to sign up to American unilateralism now, either.

What we must be clear about—the Prime Minister touched on this at some length—is the notion of regime change, which is ill-defined, and remains so today. It would set a dangerous precedent in international affairs. We have to be clear about the possible consequences of a regime change. What will the reaction be in the rest of the Arab world? If Saddam's regime falls, what kind of government system is envisaged as a replacement?

In his statement, the Prime Minister spoke about the need for Iraq to be led by someone who variously can abide by international law, bring Iraq back into the international community, make the country rich and successful, and make its Government more representative of the country. However, he was silent on the question of who or where that person or set of people is. The Prime Minister, quite rightly, with our support and that of others, was able to point to the mobilisation of forces in Afghanistan, which could lead to an alternative, more acceptable Government there. Is there the capacity or potential for a similar mobilisation to take place within Iraq?

In the context of Afghanistan, the Prime Minister made it clear that, if such a course of action proved successful—which it did—this country and the international community would then not walk away. Is a similar

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approach being identified for Iraq? Does such an approach encompass the mindset of the present American Administration? If we were not to walk away following the toppling of Saddam, who would provide the necessary presence to police and create the ongoing stability in Iraq that would be essential because of the shell-shocked nature of that country?

When the American Defence Secretary speaks of a "decapitation strategy" with a view to Iraq does he reflect the mind processes of the British Government? Should we not instead be talking about the longer-term need for a rehabilitation strategy for Iraq, not least for its innocent, oppressed people with whom none of us has any argument whatever?

On the question of the UN weapons inspectors, the report makes it clear that, despite the conduct of the Iraqi authorities towards them, they have

"valuable records of achievement in discovering and exposing Iraq's biological weapons programme and destroying very large quantities of chemical weapons stocks and missiles as well as the infrastructure for Iraq's nuclear weapons programme."

They are therefore best placed to assess the situation, and that is why the political emphasis must be on getting the UN inspectors back in. The worry from this side of the Atlantic has to be that, even if that were conceded, it is no longer of primary interest to the United States Government. That must be a deep concern, which we in this House are correct to reflect.

Finally—[Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] I am only asking questions unasked by the leader of the Conservative party. Does the Prime Minister truly believe that, on the evidence published today, a sufficient case has now been made that both clarifies Iraq's present capacity, as well as its intent?

There is much that will unfold, but it is vital that the British Government maintain their moral authority, the authority of this House and of the United Nations, and do not at any stage in the weeks and months ahead overlook the decent moral instincts of our country, which deserve to be heard here today.

The Prime Minister: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's last question is yes. I do believe that the information we published today shows that there is a continuing chemical and biological weapons programme, and an attempt by Saddam Hussein to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. That is what I believe, and that is the assessment of the Joint Intelligence Committee—and, frankly, I prefer its assessment to the assessment of the Iraqi regime, which, let us say on the basis of experience, is not one that should carry a lot of credibility.

In relation to the House of Commons, let me say to Members in all parts of the House—as I said in my statement—that in the cases of Kosovo and of Afghanistan we gave the House ample opportunity not only to debate, but to declare and express its view. I am sure that we will do so again, in accordance with the normal tradition of the House. We are not actually at the stage of military action yet; I simply emphasise that point.

Yes, it is very important that we mobilise international opinion through the United Nations. But, as President Bush rightly said to the UN General Assembly, this is a challenge for the United Nations too. Although there are many difficult questions that I have to answer, there is one difficult question that I think everyone has to answer: if the will of the UN continues to be ignored and flouted by Saddam, what then? Unless people have an answer to that question, we cannot really proceed in a way that fully reflects the reality of the situation with which we are dealing.

As for precipitate action, I do not believe that the United States, any more than ourselves, is interested in that. One of my purposes in setting out the history of this affair, however, is to show that the issue has not been dormant for 11 years, but has always been there. At some times it is thrown into sharper relief than at others, but it has always been there—and it has always been there for the very reason why the UN passed the original resolutions at the end of the Gulf war. People were astounded at the extent of the chemical-biological weapons programme. They did not know the full extent of the nuclear weapons programme. They considered, on the basis of the evidence—how could they consider otherwise?—that Saddam was not a fit person to have control of those weapons.

Throughout the past 11 years we have been trying to find different ways of dealing with this: weapons inspections, sanctions, these negotiations, more negotiations with the Iraqis. What I would say to the right hon. Gentleman—this is why I think all of us who believe that the issue has to be dealt with must choose our language carefully—is that the one thing I am sure of is that there is no prospect of a proper weapons inspection regime going back in there and doing its job properly unless Saddam knows that the alternative is his being forced to comply with the UN will.

In relation to regime change, incidentally, I would say that whatever the difficulties in Afghanistan, anyone who actually went and talked to ordinary people there would find that they much prefer the current situation to the situation that they experienced under the Taliban.

As for not walking away, we should not walk away from the situation in Afghanistan, and the US Administration themselves have made clear that should it come to regime change in Iraq they will not walk away from that either. I simply emphasise this point. Of course all sorts of issues still have to be resolved, but the fact is, as I said a few weeks ago, that the first decision we must make is this: do we allow the situation to continue, with this weapons of mass destruction programme? If we say no to that, do we try to mobilise international support? Answer, yes—that is what we are trying to do. But if the international support is not adhered to, then we must have the courage and determination to take action. Otherwise, in the end, all those expressions of international will are going to count for nothing.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): In his speech to the TUC two weeks ago, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"I believe it is right to deal with Saddam through the United Nations."

Having today made what is an incontrovertible case against Saddam, will my right hon. Friend confirm that any action taken by our Government will be solely for the implementation and pursuit of United Nations Security Council policy?

Also in his speech to the TUC, my right hon. Friend said

"We must restart the Middle East peace process. We must work with all concerned"

so that terrorism could end, and the Palestinians have their rights. Can he explain—if not today, as soon as possible—what action he and the Government will take to restart and advance the middle east peace process?

Has my right hon. Friend noted that, following the terrible murder of the Glasgow student, Yoni Jesner, by Palestinian terrorists last week, one of his kidneys was used to save the life of a seven-year-old Palestinian girl—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is far too long.

The Prime Minister: Let me respond to the two points that my right hon. Friend very fairly made. The first answer is yes: the action that we need to take is to ensure that the UN resolutions are properly implemented—that is the clear purpose. Secondly, I entirely agree that it is important for the middle east to restart the process. What are we doing on that? We are working with the Americans and others to try to put together a proper conference on the issue to get the peace process restarted. We stand ready to help, in any way we can, on issues of both security and political reform, which are important prerequisites to getting that peace process under way.

My right hon. Friend will know of the UN Security Council resolution that was passed last night, which is an important indication that the world should deal with this. The only point that I make about this is that I am always in one sense nervous of talking about the middle east peace process, either in the context of Afghanistan last year or in that of Iraq this year, because quite apart from the specific issues of Afghanistan and now Iraq, it is important to restart the process. It is important to reflect that, because it is my judgment, having talked to the leaders of the Arab world, that they do not hold any brief for Saddam Hussein but feel that we should pursue with equal vigour a just resolution in the middle east. As I point out to them, that just resolution must involve security for Israel as well as a viable Palestinian state.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Does the Prime Minister recollect that, in the half-century history of various states acquiring nuclear capabilities, in almost every case—from the Soviet Union in 1949 to Pakistan in 1998—their ability to do so has been greatly underestimated and understated by intelligence sources at the time? Estimates today of Iraq taking several years to acquire a nuclear device should be seen in that context, and within that margin of error. Given that, and the information from defectors five years after the Gulf war, that 400 nuclear sites and installations had been concealed in farmhouses and even schools in Iraq, is there not at least a significant risk of the utter catastrophe of Iraq possessing a nuclear device without warning, some time in the next couple of years? In that case, does not the risk of leaving the regime on its course today far outweigh the risk of taking action quite soon?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree, and I would just add two points to what the right hon. Gentleman said. His point about intelligence is an interesting one, and it is right. For the preparation of the dossier we had a real concern not to exaggerate the intelligence that we had received. For obvious reasons, it is difficult to reflect the credibility of the information, and we rate the credibility of what we have very highly. I say no more than that.

The right hon. Gentleman is also right about the obstruction. An example is the presidential sites—so-called presidential palaces that are in fact vast compounds covering the area of a reasonably large town—in which the Iraqis conceal documentation and evidence in relation to their weapons programme.

For all those reasons, I entirely agree that the danger of inaction, in my view, far outweighs the danger of action.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): The Prime Minister knows that action against Iraq that is supported by the authority of the United Nations would be acceptable to the vast majority of Members of Parliament across the House. Does he agree that those MPs who oppose independent action must explain why something that they believe to be right and justified when undertaken by many nations together becomes wrong and unjustified if we should act alone?

The Prime Minister: The point that my hon. Friend makes is exactly why the United Nations must be the way of resolving the issue. That is why I think that it was right that President Bush made it clear to the UN General Assembly that the United Nations was faced with a challenge. That is why it is important that that challenge is met and the UN resolutions are implemented.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Given that key elements of al-Qaeda remain at large and given the proven murderous intent of al-Qaeda against the United States and its allies, can the Prime Minister assure the House—notwithstanding everything that he has said about the importance of eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, with which I entirely agree—that he continues to give the utmost priority to the detection and elimination of al-Qaeda?

The Prime Minister: Yes, indeed we do. There is a continuing threat from al-Qaeda, not only in this country but in others. Although the hub of its operations has been effectively shut down in Afghanistan, none the less it still has tentacles around the world and it is important that we go after those too.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to the enforcement of the UN resolutions on weapons inspections in Iraq. Will he affirm his belief that all UN resolutions should be respected, particularly resolutions 242 and 338 concerning Israel and Palestine, which, if implemented with a time scale, would have a far-reaching impact on the stability of the whole region?

The Prime Minister: I believe that it is important that the UN's will is implemented fully. That is why I said what I did about the middle east peace process. I think that one thing, however, must be stated clearly: the UN resolutions in respect of the middle east impose obligations on both sides. They impose obligations in respect of support for terrorism and recognition of Israel as well as withdrawal from the occupied territories. That is why, in the end, the only way of making progress in

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the middle east is for all the aspects of the UN's will to be implemented in relation to the middle east. My hon. Friend did not do this, but sometimes people are selective and look simply at Israel's obligations without recognising that those obligations cover all the states in the region.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Prime Minister said earlier that there must be genuine preparedness and planning to take action if diplomacy fails. Has he given the United States any commitment that the United Kingdom would support unilateral action against Iraq?

The Prime Minister: As I said a moment ago, we are not at the stage of taking decisions about military action. However, it is important to recognise that in the event of the UN's will not being complied with we must be prepared to take that action. We are not at the point of decision yet, but no one should be in any doubt that it is important to express very clearly that should the UN's will not be resolved through weapons inspections and monitoring, it has to be resolved in a different way.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): The Prime Minister refers, in detail at times, to the report published today and has just made a reference to the inspection of presidential establishments. The report says that Iraq consistently refused to allow UNSCOM inspectors access to any of the eight presidential palaces. Yet on 15 April 1998, a report was prepared by UNSCOM inspectors on the inspections of the presidential sites, which were conducted on the 10 days running up to 15 April. If we are to rely on the Joint Intelligence Committee, should not our intelligence be more accurate than it is in this report?

The Prime Minister: I will say exactly what happened; my hon. Friend may recall it from the time. The Iraqis began what was clearly a ploy to prevent the inspectors from doing their job by designating certain sites presidential palaces. After massive pressure, the inspectors were allowed in to certain of those presidential compounds. However, the inspectors said later that because of all the obfuscation, prevarication and delay, they had no real belief that they had been able to inspect the sites properly.

I can understand people's hesitations about military action in these circumstances, because of course any sensible person has to hesitate before taking such a strong step. However, I find it hard to credit that anybody could look at the behaviour of Iraq over the past 10 or 11 years and say that the regime had co-operated with the UN inspectors. It did not and one might think that the reason for that is that it wanted to keep the weapons of mass destruction it should not have had in the first place.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Does the Prime Minister accept that those of us who believe in the concept of evil support his cautious but tough analysis and approach? Does he also accept that, given the 11-year history of this problem, it would help the House and the country to form a judgment if we had some idea of how long he was prepared to allow the United Nations to reassert its authority before looking at alternative strategies?

The Prime Minister: We are at the stage of discussing with our partners in the Security Council the form of a new resolution and what demands we might make. At this stage, therefore, I am not in a position to say that it will be so many weeks or that it will be done in a particular way. Let us be clear: there is no point in the UN taking charge of this again unless we are precise and clear about what we expect the Iraqi regime to do. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), we know from experience that it will try to avoid weapons inspections. We know from current intelligence that that is its intention. So, there will have to be a tough and clear mandate, but the precise terms of that are under discussion.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): May I put on record my thanks to my right hon. Friend for honouring the tradition of the House and calling this recall? Can he give me a clear and simple answer as to whether he thinks that UN resolution 1999 is adequate for the UN to enforce the weapons inspectors' return and any programme of disarmament, or is he thinking about using another resolution on behalf of the United Kingdom? Also, will that resolution deal only with the return of the UN inspectors and not be a fig leaf for the American intention to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein?

The Prime Minister: We do need a new resolution and it should focus on the disarmament of Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. That is what I believe we should do. It is important to have a fresh resolution because the international community needs to reassert its will very clearly and because we need to make sure that any new inspection and monitoring system is not subject to the same problems as the old one because, in the end, that was not able to do its job.

The only thing that I would say to my hon. Friends about the intentions of the United States is that, if we look at the history of this Iraqi regime over the past 10 or 11 years or throughout its time, we can see that the Americans are right to be cautious about believing that it intends to comply. In fact, I am sure that the regime does not intend to comply at all, although it may be forced to do so. Therefore, it is important that we make it clear that the pressure is there all the time. The purpose of any new UN resolution should be focused on disarmament because that is where the UN has expressed its will clearly.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): I am sure that the Prime Minister will agree that there are many threats to our security that emanate from countries in the middle east and that while those posed by Iraq may be amenable to a military solution, others are not. What I want to hear from the Prime Minister is that our policy towards Iraq is part of a coherent policy for the region and for dealing with security threats and the Islamic terrorist threats that emanate from other countries. I hope that our policy towards Iraq will be part of that.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has made a good point. I raised the issue of weapons of mass destruction three days after 11 September and before my

first meeting with President Bush in the February before that, when international terrorism was not the issue that it is today. I said that we had to have a coherent approach to weapons of mass destruction. That will mean different things in relation to different countries. I fully accept that Iraq is not the only concern. There are other countries in that region and elsewhere that are trying to develop such weapons and we need a differential strategy in respect of each of them.

I want to make it clear that, in my judgment, if we do not deal with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their retention by highly unstable states, often with dictatorial regimes, then perhaps not this year or next year, but in the not too distant future, that problem will explode on to the consciousness of the world. I believe that passionately, which is why, whatever the issues in relation to Iraq and apart from anything else in relation to it, it is important to take a stand now and say that, where we have made determinations on behalf of the international community, we will see them through. If we do not, the message to Saddam and anyone else will be that they can develop these weapons with impunity and that the international community lacks the will to deal with them.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Most of us hope that military action can be avoided, but does not the responsibility lie fully with the Iraqi regime? Whether we go to war or not surely depends on whether it is willing to comply with all the resolutions. Would not it be helpful if the UN Security Council showed a united front and did not allow itself to be divided time and again by a criminal dictator?

The Prime Minister: I totally agree, and I hope that the UN Security Council will be so united.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Ignoring the mini-me performance by the leader of the Tory party, may I ask the Prime Minister a simple question to which yes or no will suffice? Does he support regime change without UN authorisation—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I have made it clear that the purpose of any action should be the disarmament of Iraq. Whether that involves regime change is in a sense a question for Saddam as to whether he is prepared to comply with the UN resolution. I consider it odd that people can find the notion of regime change in Iraq somehow distasteful. Regime change in Iraq would be a wonderful thing. That is not the purpose of our action; our purpose is to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that if he studies the Iraqi regime carefully, he will find that it is not very redolent of anything to do with the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): The Prime Minister will be aware that when Saddam Hussein waged a war against Iran and used chemical weapons against his own people, Britain and the United States supported him. By promoting Ariel Sharon as a man of peace, President Bush has lost his credibility in the Arab world as an honest broker. Does my right hon. Friend agree with me that war on terrorism cannot be won unless the conflict in the middle east reaches a peaceful resolution and we tackle poverty?

The Prime Minister: I understand exactly why my hon. Friend feels as strongly as he does on this issue, but I want to say two things. First, it is not for me to defend the actions of the previous Government in the 1980s, but it is simply not true to say that when Saddam used chemical weapons against his own people or against the Iranians the international community endorsed it. It did not. It condemned it very strongly in a presidential statement from the UN Security Council at the time.

Secondly, in relation to Israel I think it is right that we have relaunched the middle east peace process, but if we are to get the middle east peace process back on track again, three things need to happen. The trouble is that people select one or other of them, but they all have to happen. First, the right of Israel to exist and its security have to be recognised by the whole Arab world, as indeed the UN wants. Secondly, there has to be a viable Palestinian state; and thirdly, there has to be a proper security infrastructure built within the Palestinian Authority. Otherwise, my fear is that the moment the process gets going again, it will be wrecked by a suicide bomber or a terrorist. We have to have the indemnity against that of a proper security infrastructure. All three of those things will have to happen before the process is back on track.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): It is a reasonable conclusion that it was only the threat of force that led Saddam Hussein to offer to admit inspectors. There must therefore be hope that a reinvigorated inspection and containment regime will work, but if it does not and other measures become necessary, will the Prime Minister please bear it in mind that, looking at the middle east as a whole, there is probably a greater threat from the militancy that we saw in al-Qaeda and the Taliban? That militancy is not limited to Afghanistan; it grows out of Wahhabism, the state religion of Saudi Arabia, and it will be exploited by Saddam Hussein to try to destabilise other areas. Can we please have some policies that will be directed towards the instability that comes out of Saudi Arabia, as without such policies there will be no lasting peace anywhere in the middle east?

Finally, while many people applaud the clarity and the vigour with which the Prime Minister is pursuing this matter, many people feel that there are similar problems nearer home that would benefit from the same approach.

The Prime Minister: On the right hon. Gentleman's last point, which I thought he might make and which he is entitled to make, I still believe that the peace process in Northern Ireland offers a better opportunity for a peaceful future than does any other alternative.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that fundamentalism is a real and serious issue. We must deal with it in two ways. First, we must make it clear yet again, as we had to in respect of action in Afghanistan, that this has nothing to do with the religious complexion of the particular regime. Indeed, Saddam's victims are Muslims. The idea that we should pursue Saddam because he is a Muslim is as absurd as saying that we should have pursued Milosevic because he was an Orthodox Christian. This has to do with the nature of the regime. That is what is important.

[Mr. David Trimble]

Secondly, we must give thought to how we engage with the Arab world. In that context it is important that we try to push forward the middle east peace process without apportioning blame on either side: we can blame one side or the other for a long time and get nowhere. We need a huge mobilisation of energy to get that process going. It is not simply the state of the process itself that concerns Arab opinion; it is the sense that we lack the will to push this forward. We must show that we do, provided that it is on a basis that is just for the security of Israel and for the rights and needs of the Palestinian people.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Prime Minister confirm that Iraq stands uniquely condemned for violation of Security Council resolutions based on chapter 7 of the United Nations charter? What assessment has been made of Iraq's potential for supporting terrorist groups whose aim is to undermine international peace?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the unique status of Iraq in relation to weapons of mass destruction. Although we did not deal with this in the dossier, there is no doubt, for example, that certain forms of terrorism in the middle east are supported by Iraq. That is another indication of the nature of the regime.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will the Prime Minister be explicit about his aims regarding the Government of Iraq? Ambiguity on that point will cause immense confusion later as this drama unfolds. Specifically, would he and the Government be satisfied if Iraq accepted or could be made to accept verifiable, unconditional and unrestricted access by weapons inspectors, leading to verifiable disarmament of Iraq's international weapons? If that were successfully concluded, is it not his aim in addition to seek to change the Government of Iraq or its leader?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely our aim to make sure that the United Nations will is implemented. That has to do with the disarmament of Iraq and the proper verification, inspection and monitoring regime that is able to do its job properly. We are in the present position in order to enforce exactly that. We have not been able to enforce that. For 11 years Iraq has refused to comply with that demand. I have no doubt that if the weapons inspectors are able to do their job and we are effectively able to disarm Iraq, that will indeed change the whole nature of the regime. Our ability to do so has to depend on the United Nations being prepared to assert its will firmly and to back it by the threat of force, which is the only thing that will work.

Whether I would like to see the regime of Saddam Hussein change is another matter. Personally, I think it would be wonderful for the Iraqi people and for that region of the world. Our process is fixed on the issue of disarmament because that is the UN demand that has been made. I do, however, think—this is one of the reasons why for 11 years Saddam has ducked the issue of proper inspection—that that would have a huge bearing on the regime, but that is, if you like, an incidental consequence of having a proper weapons inspection regime there, able to do its work properly.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): What few in the House or outside would disagree with in the document is the statement that Saddam Hussein's regime represents a threat, although we may have arguments about the extent of the threat, but the document is silent on what happens in the event of the Iraqi regime's being replaced by force of arms. What threats would ensue? How do we take a decision if we are not allowed to compare the threats to the area that would result from replacing the Iraqi regime by force with the threat of the Iraqi regime's being allowed to continue?

The Prime Minister: Although some of these questions—if we get to the stage of military options, what are the right options, and if we get to the stage of regime change, what replaces Saddam—do not arise for decision now, as I have said throughout I of course agree that they are very serious questions, which we need to look at. The only thing that I would say to my hon. Friend about regime change is that it is hard to think of an Iraqi regime that would be worse than Saddam, but that said, it is obviously important that we deal with all these issues, including making it quite clear to the people of Iraq that should it come to the point of regime change, that has to be done while protecting the territorial integrity of Iraq. That is an important point.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): It is still not clear to me what happens if the Prime Minister does not get the UN resolution that he is seeking.

The Prime Minister: If we cannot get the UN resolution—I believe that we can—we have to find a way of dealing with this. As I said in my Trades Union Congress speech some time ago, the international community must be the way of dealing with this, not the way of avoiding dealing with it, but I am confident that the international community will respond to what President Bush has said, what I have said and what others have said and will recognise that it is important that we lay down a very clear mandate for the UN.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): Recently I met Professor Christine Gosden, who is professor of genetic medicine at Liverpool and also a doctor who has extensive knowledge of the health of the people of Iraqi Kurdistan. She is desperately concerned that after the bombing of Halabja, significant numbers of people have cancer and there is high infant mortality. She and her team have recently put a proposal to the Department for International Development to construct a cancer hospital in Kurdistan, where there are absolutely no medical facilities. That proposal has been turned down, and I would ask my right hon. Friend to ask the Secretary of State for International Development to reconsider that decision.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of that proposal; I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has heard what my hon. Friend has said. My hon. Friend is of course right to draw attention to the appalling consequences of the attack on Halabja, in which thousands of people died in a chemical

weapons attack by Saddam, which is one very good reason why he should be disarmed of these weapons in their entirety.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Prime Minister has been very convincing about the need to take action against Iraq, but slightly less convincing about how to handle the knock-on effect of even a successful elimination of Saddam Hussein. That is why, surely, the international community needs to be galvanised behind this effort, and why many people in this country really do have concerns about the apparent American policy, which is to go for Saddam Hussein and damn the consequences. Can the Prime Minister reassure us that he has had deep conversations with President Bush on how we handle what will be a very uncertain situation in the middle east, even if Saddam Hussein is removed?

The Prime Minister: I would respond to the hon. Gentleman in this way. First, in relation to some of the concerns expressed from America, it is perfectly natural to look at the history of Saddam Hussein and what he has done and to be sceptical about whether we shall be able to get a weapons inspection regime back in there that will be able to do its job properly. That is what they are saying, and they are perfectly right in saying it. But the very reason we have gone down the road of saying, "Let the UN Security Council pass a resolution and have it implemented" is to enable us to take this step by step. We are at the stage of discussing and ensuring that we get a strong and proper mandate laid down, and then seeing that it is implemented. Later, should Saddam not comply, some of these other questions will have to be answered, and they are obviously very important questions, to which we should give careful thought.

The only thing that I would say in relation to regime change is that it is very difficult to think of a situation where the Iraqi people most of all would not be better off without Saddam. I agree that that is not an answer to the question; it is not, but I do not think we should start from the presumption that it is an impossible question to answer. I think that we will find the answer to it, but we are not at that stage yet; we are at the stage of saying, "This is the UN's will; the UN's will has to be implemented."

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): If a strategic choice opens up between international action to keep Saddam in his box and unilateral American action to destroy that box, which choice should we make?

The Prime Minister: We should make sure—I hope that this is what we have been trying to do—that the United States and the international community are working to the same agenda, and I believe that they are. I say to my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that I have seen a lot about the American relationship and criticisms of it. I believed this before I became Prime Minister, but I believe it even more strongly—in fact, very strongly; it is an article of faith with me—the American relationship and our ability to partner America in these difficult issues is of fundamental importance, not just to this country but to the wider world. Those people who want to pull apart the transatlantic relationship—my hon. Friend is not in this category, incidentally—or who can sneer about the American relationship that we have, may get some short-term benefit, but, long term, that is very dangerous to the people of this country.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Is the Prime Minister really saying that countries already in possession of weapons of mass destruction attacking those that have not is an acceptable form of preventing weapons proliferation around the world? If he is saying that, how on earth can he convince us that this approach will make the world order more stable, rather than less stable?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that I totally followed that, but if the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* Well, I am sorry, so forgive me if I am not answering his question. Surely the point is that if we know that someone has weapons of mass destruction, if they have used them before and if, as a result, the international community has said that they must be disarmed of those weapons, surely the greatest risk is letting them carry on developing those weapons and not doing anything about it.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): History tells us that there are hidden agendas in every war. On that basis, does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the timing of the proposed conflict with Iraq, particularly when the US economy is in free fall and there is evidence of corporate corruption in America involving some senior American politicians? If he is to lead us into conflict with Iraq, it should be for the right reasons, not clearly as a diversion from domestic politics in America.

The Prime Minister: No, I am afraid that I do not agree with that, but I just want to say to my hon. Friend that it is important to realise that, yes, I think it would be true to say that 11 September has made a difference to the way that America views such things. I cannot think that any country subject to that type of terrorist attack would not view the world differently as a result, and it has made the Americans anxious to ensure that the threats that they can see do not materialise and become reality, as indeed happened with the threat that was posed by al-Qaeda.

Apart from that, what is really important is that it is often difficult when things are not in the news the whole time because people think that they have not really been an issue, but I can tell my hon. Friend that in the past four or five years the issue of Iraq, weapons inspections and what we do about that regime has come over my desk pretty much week after week. It is true that the issue has not been in the news in the way that it has been in the past six months, but it has been there as an issue the whole time because people know that there is something deeply rotten in that regime. What we know now from the assessment given by our Joint Intelligence Committee is that the very thing that we feared is the very thing that the Iraqi regime is working on.

As I said earlier, I cannot say that that has to be dealt with this month, or even next month—or even, frankly, within the next six months or so. We cannot be that specific, but we can say that it would be foolish to let that regime carry on developing in the way that it is and for the world community to do nothing. What has happened—this is the point that I would make to people—is that, whether we like it or not, now is the point of decision. Occasionally, that happens in politics whenever there are time lines.

[Jim Sheridan]

One of the reasons why, when I came back a few weeks ago, I realised that I would have to go out and really explain to people why the issue was of concern was that suddenly such things come to the point of decision. That is where we are at in the international community; we are at the point of decision for Iraq. We have to be clear that the consequences of saying now to Iraq that we are not going to do anything will be really, really serious.

As I say, perhaps it would be better for everyone's sake if this issue was not on the agenda, but it is on the agenda, and it is inevitable that it is. Therefore, we have to make the decision, and I do not think that we can duck the consequences of that decision.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Many of our constituents are aware that our military forces are in action over Iraq, as the Prime Minister has said. Whether further action will be necessary if Saddam does not comply depends on whether it is right, whether it is necessary, whether it will work and whether we care. The dossier spells out the consequences if we do not care.

May I pass to the Prime Minister a view of some of my constituents? If we go from saying "No" to Saddam to saying "Action now", not everybody in this House will think that we should have a debate before a surprise attack.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that the position of our armed forces and their security would have to be uppermost in our minds as we choose how to deal with that issue. He is also right—I hope that his constituents are right as well—that, looking back, when Saddam annexed Kuwait there was no way we could stand aside. People ask why it matters to Britain. It does not matter because I am standing here saying that tomorrow Saddam is going to launch an attack on Britain. That is not the threat; the threat is that within his own region, or outside it given the missile capability that he is trying to develop, he launches an attack that threatens the stability of that region and then the wider world. All the evidence that we have is that if there is such a conflict in that region, we will not be able to stand apart from it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We will now move on.

Points of Order

12.57 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek your help about the procedure in today's debate. I understand that the Government will open the debate by moving a motion that this House do now adjourn. Such a motion is debatable and allows a vote so that hon. Members who believe that the House should continue to sit can express that view in the Lobby. However, such a vote does not permit those who will be voting to give their reasons, and it is on that point that I seek your help.

As you will know, many Members of all parties are opposed on various grounds to military action against Iraq, and many others who represent service men and women in their constituencies who may be called to fight in such a war have anxieties on behalf of them and their families. Therefore, I am asking you to accept a manuscript motion worded as follows:

"That this House declines to support a war against Iraq using the royal prerogative unless it has been authorised by both the United Nations Security Council and a motion carried in this House."

Only in that way can hon. Members discharge their responsibilities to their constituents. Such a motion would not preclude a motion to adjourn, which would follow at the end of the day's business in the usual way.

I know of no ruling by previous Speakers that would bind you to rejecting this request, and submit that your responsibility is to the House as a whole and that your authority on procedure is unchallengeable by anyone. For those reasons, I appeal to you to allow my motion to be moved, debated and voted on in parallel to the motion to adjourn.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Before you rule on the point of order made by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), would you look at the precedents and precisely those related to Iraq? Will you bear it in mind that when the House was recalled on 6 September 1990 when Saddam Hussein annexed Kuwait, the debate was on a motion for the Adjournment moved by the Government of the day? Will you further note that, when a second debate was held on this issue on 11 December 1990, it once again took place on a motion for the Adjournment moved by the Government of the day? Will you also note that, when another debate was held on 15 January 1991, it again took place on a motion for the Adjournment of the House? No manuscript amendment was moved or accepted and those debates on the Adjournment did not prevent the official Opposition from voting alongside the Government, as the official Opposition are not doing today, and did not prevent my hon. Friend from voting against his own party on every occasion?

Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please sit down.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) would make a good Clerk of the House, but there are no vacancies.

I am grateful to the Father of the House for giving me notice of his point of order. He is seeking a debate on his proposed manuscript motion before the House begins a

debate on the motion on the Order Paper. Our rules do not allow this to happen. Under Standing Order No. 14, Government business has precedence over other business except in certain defined circumstances. This is not one of those circumstances. When the House is recalled under Standing Order No. 13, the only business to be debated is that of which the Government have given notice. In this case, that is the motion for the Adjournment of the House which is set out on the Order Paper.

If the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) wishes to raise another point of order, I must advise him that he will take time out of the debate in which many Members wish to speak.

Paul Flynn: I shall be extremely brief. My point of order is that my constituents—and many of them have spoken to me—will not understand why I cannot vote today against following the Bush agenda.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It may interest Members to learn that the applicant for Clerk of the House has a faulty memory. Two substantive debates on the Gulf war were held on 21 January 1991 and on 21 February 1991. One took place under a Government motion and the other under a Scottish National party motion. In television and radio interviews, the Leader of the House has indicated sympathy for the idea of a substantive motion, so would it be in order for him to make a statement to tell us when that might be?

Mr. Speaker: We must move on.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Period adjournments),

That this House, at its rising this day, do adjourn till Tuesday 15th October.—[*Mr. Caplin.*]

Question agreed to.

Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the Adjournment debate. As I have already said, many Members wish to speak so I have put a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. Furthermore, it would not be appreciated if any hon. Member were to approach the Chair while I or any of the Deputy Speakers are in it. That would be most inconsiderate.

1.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke for an hour and a half and took 25 interventions about the case that we make for effective action in respect of the threat posed by Iraq. In view of that, I shall endeavour to be as brief as possible.

I suggest to the House that the issues before us come down to four. First, is the Iraqi regime the threat that we say it is? Secondly, are there not other countries that have developed equally dangerous arsenals of weapons of mass destruction? Thirdly, is not the international community guilty of double standards? Fourthly, even if Iraq is the danger that we claim, is the threat of force, or its use, justified? Let me deal with each of these questions in turn.

First, how much of a threat is the Iraqi regime? My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out very clearly the nature of the threat, and that was well endorsed by the House as a whole. The dossier that we have published today sets out a forensically argued case about the nature of the regime.

The main focus of the questions to my right hon. Friend was about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, but I want to detain the House briefly on another aspect of the Iraqi regime—its record on human rights. That record speaks volumes not only about the way in which the regime deals directly with its own people, but with the way in which it would seek to operate in respect of other countries and territories beyond its borders. Taking both the threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and its human rights record, Iraq is in a league of its own—uniquely evil and uniquely dangerous.

On human rights, no other regime now in power anywhere in the world has Saddam's record for brutality, torture and execution as a routine way of life and as the principal means by which the elite stays in power.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: I will in a second.

Page 48 of the dossier spells out starkly the number of Iraqis recently executed under Saddam Hussein. However, individual human stories sometimes better bring home the true bestiality of this regime. For example, in October 2000, Amnesty International reported the beheading of dozens of women by the Saddam regime allegedly for prostitution. The victims were executed in front of their homes by a militia created by Saddam's son, Uday. Among those executed for "prostitution" was Dr. Najat

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Mohammed Haydar, an obstetrician in Baghdad's leading hospital whose only alleged crime apart from prostitution was to be critical of corruption in the Iraqi health services.

As the dossier shows, the Iraqi security apparatus and weaponry are not incidental extras to be used in extremis. They are fundamental to the regime's exercise of power. The Iraqi regime has systematically persecuted and oppressed ethnic and religious groups. No group has suffered more than the Iraqi Kurds. In one year, Amnesty International estimates that more than 100,000 Kurds disappeared or were killed. The world had a glimpse of the genocide in 1988 when Iraqi planes used poison gas to kill 5,000 Kurds in Halabja. By then, Saddam had already shown his appetite for chemical weapons in the war with Iran. Halabja confirmed that Saddam's weapons of mass destruction would be turned against his own people as well as the outside world.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose—*

Ann Clwyd *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd).

Ann Clwyd: Given the awful atrocities committed by the Iraqi regime, will my right hon. Friend consider a non-violent option for dealing with it? It would involve bringing indictments against leading members of the regime for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. I believe that such an approach should be considered. In Norway this week, we talked to the Attorney-General there about Uday Hussein, whom my right hon. Friend has just mentioned. We took a complaint about Uday Hussein to Norway, because some of his victims are there. There are also victims in the United Kingdom, so why are we not following this approach?

Mr. Straw: Let me first pay tribute to my hon. Friend's tireless efforts on behalf of the Kurds against the Iraqi regime. She makes an important point—one which I have often discussed with her. She heads up the Anglo-American organisation Indict, which has the aim of bringing to proper justice leaders of the Iraqi regime among others. I support her efforts. Indeed, I was discussing her concerns about the pursuit of the leaders of the Iraqi regime in the manner in which we wish with the Attorney-General only yesterday. But in the world in which we live the possibility of being able to extract Saddam so that he can stand trial in The Hague is, to put it mildly, fairly limited, so we must pursue other means.

However, going back to my hon. Friend's first point, I do not believe that there is anyone in the House or beyond represented on the Security Council who does not wish for a peaceful resolution of the matter. Above all, the responsibility for ensuring a peaceful resolution of the issue of disarming Iraq rests with Saddam Hussein alone. Iraq has fought wars of aggression against two neighbours, and launched missile attacks against three others.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall when I have made some progress.

In 1991, following the Gulf war, the United Nations Security Council required inspectors to remove the threat and disarm Iraq. The inspectors did some heroic work during their seven years, as we heard earlier, notwithstanding continued intimidation and harassment. Their achievements are spelt out on page 40 of the dossier. But in 1998, as they closed in on the most vital secrets at the heart of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons programmes, they were forced to leave. As the Prime Minister spelt out, and as page 16 of the dossier reveals, in 1998, the regime still retained an arsenal of matériel for chemical and biological weapons. Since then, Iraq has continued to produce chemical and biological agents and their means of delivery, and to make other attempts to develop nuclear weapons.

Let me turn to my second question, which is implicit in those asked by the hon. Members for Stratford–on–Avon (Mr. Maples) and for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik): what about the other countries that may have amassed equally dangerous stockpiles of weapons? What are we doing about them? As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 14 September last year in the first debate following 11 September, we in the United Kingdom are greatly concerned about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in several countries. In tackling the problem, we engage the relevant Governments, both bilaterally and through the United Nations and other international bodies such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, to persuade them to comply with their international non-proliferation obligations. We also exert pressure on them through our efforts nationally and with partners in various international export control regimes to block their access to sensitive materials and technology relevant to weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles. It is our hard-headed judgment that we can best prevent the use of their weaponry through diplomacy, but that is simply not the case with Iraq.

With Saddam Hussein, the diplomatic route has been constantly and consistently obstructed by his intransigence and duplicity. It has been blocked altogether since December 1998, leaving us no alternative but to consider other options. Iraq, not the UN, has chosen the path of confrontation.

Mr. Salmond: A few seconds ago, the Prime Minister set great store by the American relationship, but might there not be a difference between that and agreement with the United States Administration? Has the Foreign Secretary seen the speech made by former Vice-President Gore in the early hours of this morning in which he argued that by being willing to countenance action outwith the United Nations the Administration were, as he put it, exhausting the reservoir of support built up after 11 September? Does the Foreign Secretary have any sympathy with that view or did the Government agree with Vice-President Gore only when he was in office?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is quoting Mr. Gore with great selectivity. I listened carefully in the General Assembly to the speech made by President Bush of the United States which, as a leading diplomat in the United Nations said to me afterwards, was one of the most positive pro-UN speeches to be made by an American President in many decades. I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at that speech. President Bush was saying that this is

a real problem for the world and the world's international institutions need to deal with it—that is exactly what we are doing.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): If that speech was so positive about the United Nations, can the Foreign Secretary explain to the House why last Friday we got the Bush doctrine that virtually bypasses the UN and tears up international law because it supports pre-emptive strikes anywhere and at any time that President Bush sees a threat?

Mr. Straw: If my hon. Friend read the text of the national security strategy that President Bush and Secretary Powell published, she would see that the gloss put on it is not justified. I shall give the House two quotations. First, it states:

"In keeping with our"—

the United States'—

"heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage."

Secondly, it states:

"The United States is committed to lasting institutions like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of American States . . . In all cases, international obligations are to be taken seriously."

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): In the 1980s, Britain, along with many other western countries, was a major arms supplier to Iraq. We continued to supply weapons until the 1989 Baghdad arms fair, more than a year after the atrocity at Halabja. During that time, many thousands of people died in the Iran-Iraq war. Since then, we have supplied countless weapons to Saudi Arabia, Iran and other countries in the region. I understand that we are now supplying highly selective and sensitive military equipment to Iran. Does the Foreign Secretary not think that it is time to reassess the whole arms export strategy? Does he not think for a moment that what goes around comes around, that Iran has developed a nuclear weapons capability just as Iraq may wish to do, and other countries in the region have massive capabilities?

Mr. Straw: Britain has one of the most effective and rigorous systems of arms export control anywhere in the world—more effective than any of our European partners and on a par with that operated by the United States—*[Interruption.]* Yes, of course, that is exactly the point I have been dealing with. Other countries have weapons of mass destruction, but the difference is that we are seeking to deal with the threat that they pose by diplomatic means. That process and possibility has been wholly rejected by Iraq, not the international community.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Let me make some progress.

What further distinguishes Iraq from other proliferators is the nature of its intent. It is not just the fact that it has weapons of mass destruction, but that it has much greater intent to use them. Saddam's is the only regime in recent history to have used chemical weapons, the only regime to have been declared in breach of the Geneva protocol on chemical weapons and the only regime that sees those weapons of mass destruction as an active tool of regional and internal dominance. As page 19 of the dossier sets out, Saddam is prepared to use those weapons—they are by no means a last resort.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Would the Foreign Secretary tell us under what circumstances people believe Saddam Hussein would now use his weapons of mass destruction? Is not the most likely circumstance—in fact the only likely one—one in which he was desperate, cornered or beaten and used them as a suicidal gesture? Containment has kept the peace for 11 years. Is it not possible that a military invasion—the Bush agenda—would be likely to bring about the horror that we all fear, which is the use of those weapons and unimaginable consequences for the region and the world?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend has come to the nub of the matter. He believes that Iraq poses no significant threat, and is no different from any other country that has weapons of mass destruction. Our view is very different. Not only does Iraq possess those weapons but, unlike other countries, it has a much greater intent to use them.

Paul Flynn: Why?

Mr. Straw: There is no need to look in the crystal ball for the reason why—look in the book at Saddam Hussein's record. Look at the fact that he has not only sought to gas people in Iran, an alleged enemy, but has used those biological and chemical weapons against his own people. He has done it once; he has done it twice; he can easily do it again.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I agree that evidence that Saddam Hussein is building up weapons of mass destruction is crucial, but could the Foreign Secretary explain why, in the US Department of State's annual report on patterns of global terrorism, which was put on the website and presented to Congress in May this year, there was no mention under the Iraq heading of any build-up of weapons of mass destruction?

Mr. Straw: I cannot explain the contents of one document published in the United States, but I can say that the United States Administration have hardly been slow in coming forward in expressing their concern about Iraq.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Today has shown how important it was that Parliament was recalled. It has enabled the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary to set out their case with great clarity to a sceptical House. How much progress have the US and UK Governments made in bringing together a mighty coalition of the western democracies and the Arab states? Does he not agree that the more members of the coalition there are the better will be the chances to increase the pressure and of a favourable outcome?

Mr. Straw: We have devoted a great deal of work to that and I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his question. While I was at the United Nations General Assembly last week for a week, as was Secretary of State Colin Powell, we both met a large number of Foreign Ministers from Arab and Islamic states to discuss, among many other things, the threat posed by Iraq. Not one of

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the Foreign Ministers to whom I spoke has anything but contempt for and concern about the Iraqi regime, and they are, above all, praying that the action that we all hope and believe that the international community will now take, will relieve the region of the threat posed by the weapons of mass destruction that Saddam has.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I should like to make some progress. I have taken a number of interventions.

The third question that the House needs me to deal with is whether, in its approach, the international community has been guilty of using double standards, especially with regard to Israel/Palestine. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister dealt with that at some length, but let me explain why we do not accept the argument.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, Britain wants to see the full implementation of all UN resolutions in the middle east and elsewhere. The current situation in Israel and in the occupied territories is dreadful. Our condemnation of suicide bombers and those who organise them is absolute. But despicable though they were at the weekend, the latest terrorist outrages do not justify the latest incursions by the Israeli defence force into Ramallah or Gaza.

I said at the weekend that those forces must be withdrawn. Working with our international partners in the United Nations, in the small hours of this morning, Security Council resolution 1435 was passed with our full support. It demands that Israel immediately cease measures in and around Ramallah, including the destruction of Palestinian security and civilian infrastructure; demands the expeditious withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces from Palestinian cities towards a return to the positions held prior to September 2000; and calls on the Palestinian Authority to meet its express commitments to ensure that those responsible for terrorist acts are brought to justice.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): Will the Foreign Secretary give way on that point?

Mr. Straw: I should like to make some more progress.

United Nations Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1402 set out the steps that all parties in the region must take to secure lasting peace. They impose requirements on Israel, on the Palestinians and on every Arab state. Despite the horrendous violence, there has been some progress in the region. Exactly a year ago, as I have particular reason to recall, even uttering the word "Palestine" caused controversy in some quarters. Now a commitment to a viable state of Palestine alongside a secure state of Israel is the official policy of the UN, provided by resolution 1397, with the full support of the US.

One other aspect of the double standards argument is that the military action taken by the UK and the US during the past decade has been directed against Muslims. Such claims are palpably untrue. The facts speak for themselves. The four major military campaigns that Britain has fought during the past decade have each had the effect of helping oppressed Muslims—Kuwait in 1991, Bosnia in 1995, Kosovo in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001.

In the case of Iraq, our differences are emphatically not with the long-suffering people of Iraq. With the United States, Britain sponsored a new UN resolution earlier this year to increase the flow of civilian goods to Iraq. But our efforts to soften the impact of sanctions on the Iraqi people have been frustrated by the Iraqi regime, which prefers to spend oil revenues on weapons. Saddam has done nothing to meet the UN's conditions for the lifting of sanctions, condemning the Iraqi people to a life of penury.

Mr. Galloway: Will Israel react to last night's Security Council resolution in the way that it reacted to the one after its rampage through the holy land at Easter when the UN unanimously demanded that Israel accept inspectors from the UN to check reports of mass destruction of refugees in the camp at Jenin? Israel told the inspectors to get stuffed, they got stuffed and not another word has been said about the resolution since.

Mr. Straw: I hope that the resolution is implemented. I am pleased to note that my hon. Friend is calling for the full implementation of all UN Security Council resolutions. There is a hierarchy of resolutions, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) referred. Chapter 6, under which all resolutions relating to the middle east have been issued, relates to the pacific resolution of disputes. Above that, there are the mandatory chapter 7 resolutions, which impose the clearest possible obligations, usually on a single state rather than on two or three states, which is what chapter 6 is there for. Chapter 7 imposes mandatory obligations on states that are completely out of line with international law and policy, and the United Nations has decided in its charter that the failure to meet those obligations may be met by the use of force.

I look forward to my hon. Friend saying that he supports chapter 6 and chapter 7 resolutions, and that he wants all the chapter 7 resolutions, which all relate to Iraq, implemented in full.

The fourth question is whether even if Saddam is as great a threat as we say, it is justifiable to use force to deal with the threat. The short answer to that question is yes, provided force is a last resort and its use is consistent with international law.

Law, whether domestic or international, fundamentally depends for its legitimacy on the values it reflects. Law without values is no law at all. But while the moral legitimacy of any law will strengthen the natural consent for that law, there will always be some who reject or despise the values on which the law is based. Against them, the law has to be enforced, ultimately, by the force of arms. But the force which is used has itself to be consistent with the moral and legal framework it seeks to defend. Law without force is no law. Force without law is no law.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall not give way.

Those realities about the nature of law have long been recognised within states. The painful experience of the 20th century made us recognise them too in respect of

regulation between states. The League of Nations was shown by its specific failure over Abyssinia literally to be powerless. When exhortation ran out, the world community had nothing. The subsequent collapse of the League gave the green light to the tyrannical excesses of Hitler, and in the end, much more force had to be used, and much more blood shed, than if both the system and the world's then leaders had been capable of acting to enforce international norms of behaviour.

The architects of the United Nations learned those lessons.

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Foreign Secretary has indicated that he wishes to proceed.

Mr. Straw: I know that many hon. Members wish to speak, and I have taken many interventions.

The architects of the United Nations learned the lessons of what happened in the pre-war years. The UN declaration of human rights and the UN charter are the most powerful invocations I know of the moral imperatives behind international law

"to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

But the declaration and the charter skilfully combined high idealism with hard-headed realism and, above all, recognised that, as with domestic law, the ultimate enforcement of the rule of international law had to be by force of arms.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: If my hon. Friend will permit me, I will carry on.

Diplomacy, of course, should always be tried first, but the paradox of some situations—Iraq is pre-eminently one—is that diplomacy has a chance of success only if it is combined with the clearest possible prospect that force of arms will be used if diplomacy fails. As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, has said,

"We have learned that sensitive diplomacy must be backed by the threat of military force if it is to succeed."

We have used all the diplomatic instruments at the disposal of the United Nations, but, so far, Saddam has rendered them unworkable.

The recent sequence of events has been a re-enactment of the past 12 years. Only two weeks ago, the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz, said that Iraq would never readmit weapons inspectors. Then President Bush made his powerful speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 12 September, and a new international consensus started to come together. Saddam's alibis started to run out. Just a week ago, we were suddenly told that Iraq would readmit the inspectors without condition, after all. Some of us were a little sceptical about that offer—quite rightly. Two days later, the Iraqi Foreign Minister began to re-impose conditions on his previously unconditional offer. This is a pretence at co-operation, but even this has come about only because Saddam has at last realised that he faces a clear choice: willing compliance or, I am sorry to say, compliance by the use of force.

Some assert that the policy of containment has worked. My answer is that containment, backed by the potential use of force, was broadly working while the inspectors were able to do their job and the Security Council's resolve remained firm. But all the evidence suggests that Saddam has used the past four years, without inspectors, to break out of his containment and to seek to re-establish his power. Only free and unfettered inspections, backed by a Security Council united in its determination to disarm Iraq, offer the prospect of dealing with the threat by peaceful means.

A peaceful conclusion is the outcome that is desired on both sides of the Atlantic, both by Her Majesty's Government and by the United States Administration. We should applaud the efforts of President Bush to secure that end. We are now pressing for a new resolution, setting out the case for a tough and intrusive weapons inspection regime. Detailed discussions are taking place as I speak between ourselves and our key permanent five partners.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Straw: I am just coming to a conclusion, if my hon. Friend will allow me.

This resolution—if we get it through, as we believe we should—should allow for an early test of whether the latest Iraqi offer is genuine. But if it is to have any effect on Iraq, it must, under chapter 7, carry the implicit threat of force.

We should all be gravely exercised by the potential use of force, because innocent people are killed by the use of force and because we in government expect our troops to go into action and put their lives, and their futures and those of their families, on the line. I hope and pray that it will not come to a use of force. If there is military action, any participation in it by Her Majesty's Government would be strictly in accordance with our obligations in international law, and its purpose would be the disarmament of the Iraqi regime's weapons of mass destruction and an end to its deliberate and persistent flouting of the will of the United Nations.

The choice is Saddam's. He has flouted international law and poses a serious and significant threat to the region and beyond, yet this threat can be resolved without force, by full disarmament verified by the inspectors. I hope that he makes the right choice. It is true that we, too, face some uncomfortable choices. But if Saddam continues to defy the international community, the alternative—us doing nothing—will be much worse. We will have re-empowered a monster.

We faced difficult choices over Kosovo, Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, but does anyone now say that we should not have taken action in respect of those countries? Eleven years ago, we faced difficult choices over Iraq, but to have stood by, then, and allowed Saddam free rein across the Arab world would have had dire and incalculable consequences for the region and for international security.

Abdication of responsibility, and equivocation in the face of evil, led Europe down a desperate path in the late 1930s. From the ashes was born the United Nations, and a new international order. But this international order requires law, and law requires enforcement. That is the issue before us today.

1.36 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): It is right that Parliament has been recalled to debate the serious and unfolding situation with regard to Iraq. It is also right that it does so in the light of the dossier published earlier today. I have to say, though, that it is regrettable that we have not been given more time fully to absorb the contents of that dossier before beginning this debate.

Over the past few weeks, there has been much discussion of the threat of weapons of mass destruction, of the evil intentions and history of Saddam Hussein and of the prospect of war. As a result, there has also been much concern, some of which I suspect we will hear forcefully and sincerely expressed today. I hope that all of us in the House will listen to those views with respect.

We support the Prime Minister's stance today. We share his analysis of the threat. We support the Government's attempts to secure a firm resolution from the United Nations Security Council. We, too, would like to see this issue resolved without recourse to armed intervention but, like the Government, we accept that military action may well in the end be necessary; and if it is, we will support it.

I want to set out our position on this issue as concisely and clearly as I can. I, too, have questions to ask and I will be seeking clarifications. We on the Opposition Benches are not pressing for war. We do not want war, and we do not seek it. I have spent a significant part of my political life working for peace, but not peace at any price: not peace at the cost of evil and destruction; not peace at the expense of the overriding duty to protect our citizens; and certainly not an uneasy peace for the short term leading to a greater violation of real peace in the longer term. If there is to be war, it must be because there is no other effective or lasting way of achieving our prime objective. That objective—as the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have said—has always been and must continue to be the elimination of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.

We now know from the dossier that the weapons exist or, at the very least, are in the course of development. We know that they will pose an increasing threat if their development is allowed to continue. The truth is simple. Biological and chemical weapons are lethal and they know no boundaries in the hands of wicked and unscrupulous men. We know that the next generation of delivery systems that Iraq is trying to obtain from North Korea will bring Europe within the range of these weapons. We know that nuclear capability is not far off, and we know that all this is in the hands of a megalomaniac who will have no scruples about using it to achieve his ends. There is no question but that the threat is there, and that it is real.

Paul Flynn: On the question of the perpetual nature of the Opposition's dealing with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, will the right hon. Gentleman look up a question asked in April 1990, in which the then Conservative Government were asked to beef up the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspections of Iraq to see whether it had a nuclear weapons programme? The answer given by the then Member for Bristol, West—the Minister at the time—was that the Government had full confidence that Iraq, as a signatory to the non-proliferation programme, would not develop nuclear weapons, and that they did not intend to take the action urged by the hon. Member in question relating to inspections. Will not the right hon. Gentleman offer at least one mea culpa—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a speech.

Mr. Ancram: I would need notice of the hon. Gentleman's specific question, as I was not a Member of the House at that time. Let me say to him seriously that this shows how important it is to have the intelligence to know what is going on, and to have inspectors on the ground. He makes the case for the stance that the Prime Minister has taken today, which the Conservative party supports.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): On the question of biological weapons, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it was the United States that supplied Saddam Hussein with much of the material necessary to build up his biological weapons programme? Does he also accept the findings of the Scott report, which confirm that the Tory Government of the 1980s were willing and prepared to supply Saddam with military equipment, including plutonium, and that the export licences were signed to allow that to happen?

Mr. Ancram: If the hon. Gentleman were to check what was going on then, he would find that material was made available also by the Soviet Union and other countries in Europe—*[Interruption.]* The point is simple: the lesson is that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction today; he is developing them, and they are a threat to the international community. Given what the hon. Gentleman has said about his concerns, I am surprised that he is not supporting the stance taken by his Prime Minister today.

Mr. Redwood: Given the importance of producing the strongest possible coalition against that evil regime, what advice would my right hon. Friend offer the Prime Minister for his forthcoming discussions with the German Chancellor, who seems to be undermining the attempt to put pressure on Iraq?

Mr. Ancram: I hope that when the Prime Minister meets the German Chancellor, he will show leadership and suggest to him that he was wrong in the stance that he took in his campaign. The Prime Minister might also remind the Chancellor of the German Republic that, if he is serious about a common foreign and security policy, what we have heard from him over the past few weeks is the complete antithesis of that.

Let me return to my remarks—

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: No. I shall make some progress because a lot of people want to speak. I shall see how I go; I may well come back to the hon. Gentleman in due course.

We must accept that achieving the objective of eliminating the weapons of mass destruction will almost certainly mean, one way or the other, the end of Saddam

Hussein's regime. That is not a self-standing objective, nor should it be. It will, however, almost certainly be an inevitable consequence—or, indeed, even the sole means, in certain circumstances—of achieving our objective of eliminating weapons of mass destruction. That must remain the key objective. We have a responsibility first to pursue with vigour non-violent means of achieving it, but we must face the fact, as the Foreign Secretary did at the end of his remarks, that in the end this may require pre-emptive military action.

So long as and so far as the Government determinedly pursue that objective in those terms, they will have the support of the official Opposition. However, let me put our support in perspective. Our support is not unconditional and it will not give carte blanche to any action the Government might decide to take in the future. The objective of eliminating the weapons of mass destruction is crucial, but it must be done in the right way. There will undoubtedly be temptations to cut corners, and I say that there must be no cutting of corners. The stakes are enormous and go far beyond a limited campaign in Iraq.

The prize for getting it right is significant: it is the removal of a real and growing threat to our security from the continued development of WMD. But the prize is far more than that. The prize is a more stable middle east, no longer threatened by the dangerous ambitions of Saddam Hussein. The prize is a free democratic Iraq. The prize is a world in which dictators and terrorists who want to get their hands on, or to develop, nuclear, chemical or biological weapons of mass destruction will know that the international community will act with resolution to stop them if they try.

If we get it wrong, however, the cost is also significant. We cannot let Saddam get the better of us, once again running diplomatic rings round the international community as he continues to build up his arsenals. Nor can we afford to let the Islamic world believe, as it is inclined to do, that this is somehow about Islam. We cannot allow Iraq to descend into anarchy, or let the brutality of Saddam's regime be replaced by just another dictator or another reign of terror. That is why the way forward must be clearly drawn and the parameters unmistakably set out.

Essentially, that means four things: we must act to the greatest extent with the rest of the international community, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) made clear. We must act legally—the Conservative party puts great store by the rule of law and will want to be assured throughout this process that international law is being pursued. If and when we have to act militarily, we must act with overwhelming and totally effective force. Before we start any such action, we should have a clear vision of the new Iraq that must replace the old and a comprehensive plan for realising it. I shall return to those points, but first I shall give way to the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook).

Mr. Frank Cook: The right hon. Gentleman has emphasised the fact that we must not get it wrong. The Prime Minister told us with great firmness today that Iraq has biological and chemical weapons that can be ready in 45 minutes, which is a fraction of the time that we have been discussing this issue. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that we shall be able to prevent Saddam from launching those weapons and making matters infinitely worse in the time when we are launching our first attack?

Mr. Ancram: If we do nothing and do not deal with the weapons of mass destruction, the threat will be far greater next month and in the months ahead. As I shall make clear later, one comes to a stage in the development of those weapons where it is even more difficult to secure their removal and decommissioning.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: I want to look at the four essentials that I have set out, and to make some progress.

First, we must, alongside the United States, vigorously pursue the UN resolution route set out by President Bush in his address to the United Nations. That important speech set out a course within which many international doubters have found reassurance. I know that because I was in Pakistan when that speech was made, and I addressed serious concerns there before and after the speech was made.

We must not, however, invest too much hope in the United Nations. We must recognise that Saddam Hussein sees the United Nations route as some kind of bazaar—one in which, as he has demonstrated over the past 10 years, he is adept at haggling. His price is never constant. He is always seeking to shift it further in his favour, and too often he has been allowed to get away with it. That must stop now.

The first way in which to stop that is by securing the right kind of resolution from the United Nations. That resolution will be a test of the United Nations' will to match up to the standards of its charter: it must be robust; it must contain three unambiguously stated elements; it must set out clearly the requirements that Iraq must meet, including unchallengeable obligations to the weapons inspectorate; it must have a firm and immutable time frame, within which the requirements must be met and the obligations fulfilled; and it must make it clear in unequivocal terms that failure to comply will, with the backing of the UN, immediately open the way for whatever effective action is appropriate to secure the objective of eliminating the weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): In describing his party's objectives, the right hon. Gentleman used the phrase "free and democratic Iraq". The Prime Minister did not use that phrase; he used the phrase "the integrity of Iraq". What happens if it is not possible to have both a free and democratic Iraq and the integrity of Iraq? Which is the more important: democracy or the integrity of Iraq?

Mr. Ancram: We first have to achieve the elimination of the weapons of mass destruction. I shall come a little later to what I believe the Government should be addressing in terms of the future of Iraq.

So far as the UN resolution is concerned, there must be no qualifications, no escape hatches and no room for haggling. The message must be clear to Saddam Hussein: one way or other, the game is up, and it is up for ever.

Any action that we take cannot go off at half cock. We must be prepared to contribute to the US initiative all the force and capability required to succeed and succeed

[Mr. Ancram]

quickly. If military action begins in Iraq we must, with our allies, pursue it with overwhelming force and single purpose. Our engagement must be swift and effective.

Our forces are already stretched from Sierra Leone through the Balkans to Afghanistan. Can the Foreign Secretary or the Minister of State reassure the House that the Government will ensure that whatever resources are needed will be made available? Are manpower, equipment and ordnance available and ready for the task that may lie ahead?

Mr. Dalyell: The right hon. Gentleman has used the words "overwhelming force" three times already. Does "overwhelming force" include the use of B61-11s? Those are the earth-penetrating nuclear weapons which, we are told, are based in the British Indian ocean territory of Diego Garcia. If there is to be overwhelming force, and if it is to involve nuclear weapons, with the B2 bombers that are based in the hangars at Diego Garcia, ought not the House of Commons to be told about it?

Mr. Ancram: The force that will be required is that which is appropriate and most effective in achieving the objective. I am certainly not going to speculate at this stage on what that force will be. Indeed, at this particular stage we need to make it clear that the United Nations resolution is the first objective to be fulfilled: only if Saddam breaches that will we consider the second option.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if diplomacy fails and force has to be used, we must do all that we can to ensure the safety of any service men whom we commit to that force, given the threat of biological or chemical weapons? Does he also agree that this time there must not be the haphazard method of immunisation and vaccination that caused so much distress and grief after the Gulf war? If a Defence Minister is to respond to the debate, will my right hon. Friend ask him to give us a substantial assurance that plans now exist to ensure the safety of our troops if they should be committed?

Mr. Ancram: I thank my hon. Friend for that important question. I am sure that the Minister of State for Defence heard what he had to say. We must learn the lessons of some of the problems that have arisen in the past, and I hope that the Minister will reassure us that that is now being done.

We must have a clear vision of the Iraq that we want to see emerge from any conflict, and that we shall need to stand ready to help to build. It is not enough simply to stop Saddam achieving a nuclear arsenal; it is not enough simply to stop his brutal reign of fear. We need to know what comes next. We need to hear from the Government that there is a blueprint—that there are plans and resources—so that a democratic, prosperous and renewed Iraq can quickly enter the family of nations and the global economy.

If we can persuade the world that we are genuinely looking beyond Saddam and that we have worked out the detail of what must come after him, we will be that much more likely to bring the world with us. If we can convey powerfully enough a vibrant vision of the new Iraq, we will be that much more likely to bring the people of Iraq with us as well.

All this will also have important implications in the middle east and the Arab world. I heard what the Prime Minister had to say about the middle east, and I support his call for renewed dialogue to achieve the two-state solution. We must also be aware of the potential knock-on effects in other Arab countries in the region, and of the dangers of destabilisation. The last thing we want is the destabilisation of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states in general. We need a clear, positive and saleable picture of a post-Saddam middle east that creates stability and encourages prosperity. How much diplomatic consultation—I ask this of the Foreign Secretary—is taking place to ensure that that happens? How much work is being done to ensure that, post-Saddam, international oil prices, for example, will be objectively balanced rather than politically skewed?

The threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction is there, and it is growing. International terrorism and its potential involvement in the use of such weapons compound that threat. But the key question will still be asked, and has been asked today: is all this enough to justify war? I believe that if the robust UN resolution route fails to materialise, or if Saddam Hussein treats it with his usual contempt, the justification for military action exists. The weapons of mass destruction must be eliminated before they can be developed to a level at which they become their own deterrent against their elimination, and an even greater threat as a result.

Then there will remain the question "Why now?" When is the time ever absolutely right for action, and how often has inaction or postponed action led to an even worse threat and greater attrition? There are certain defining moments in history which are either seized or missed irrevocably. The cost of missing them is always high, almost invariably in terms of human suffering and destruction. I believe that we are facing a defining moment now. If we fail to seize it, our responsibility for what could follow will be grave indeed.

We need to ask whether, if between 1933 and 1936 the international community had managed to mobilise the determination and action to prevent German rearmament, the horrors of the second world war might have been avoided. On that occasion timidity and caution, and the principle of avoiding conflict, triumphed. Of course history never repeats itself, but the lessons are there to be learned.

The House is rightly anxious—it would be extraordinary if it were not—but I believe that the worst thing we could do now would be to show uncertainty in the face of what is an undeniably serious and mounting threat to us all. We are all searching for peace—a peace that these weapons of mass destruction threaten. Peace can never be bought cheaply; often it can be found only in grave decisions and in readiness for war. None of us rejoices in the prospect of military conflict, but we know that peace can never sit quietly alongside the horrific development of Saddam Hussein's germs, gas and, eventually, nuclear weapons. That would be the peace of the deliberately averted gaze, and it would end in tears.

Our message to Saddam Hussein today is blunt and simple. "You have reached the end of the road; destroy your weapons or we will do it for you."

History has demonstrated that when the House shows its courage and united determination, it can turn the tide of events. I hope that today we can find that courage and

that determination, and send the message across the world that here in Britain the despot and the terrorist will never be allowed to win—and that if we have to fight to achieve that, we will.

1.57 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): This has been a vigorous and questioning debate, as befits a matter of peace and war. I hope that it will be the start of a process involving further debates on the Floor of the House, in Committees and elsewhere, so that a real dialogue can take place between the Government and the public—and, of course, here in Parliament.

We might ask ourselves what would have been different had the debate been held eight days ago, before Saddam Hussein's offer of unconditional entry by weapons inspectors. Before that, the course appeared fairly clear, pointing towards two resolutions—probably United Nations resolutions—the second being tabled in the event of further defiance. Have any of the essentials changed since last Monday?

Tariq Aziz, Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, argues that there can now be an unconditional return of weapons inspectors. Are sanctions to be lifted? Saddam Hussein himself has given a firm assurance that

"Iraq is clear of all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons".

I hope that no one in the House believes that, and that we shall proceed in a spirit of total scepticism in regard to anything said in that respect. Now, however, the unconditional acceptance of weapons inspectors has been qualified by questions of national sovereignty, and the issue of the palaces looms.

The United States may also be in danger of making fresh demands. Certainly many key figures have considered weapons inspections irrelevant in the past. The President was prepared to allow the Vice-President to make spine-chilling speeches about the irrelevance of weapons inspectors and about what may be a total illusion—that people would be dancing in the streets at the time of regime change. He appeared to be boxing the President in, the only way out of the box being, possibly, military action. The Administration are of course, not noted for their multilateralism.

The essential facts remain, and most of us find them troubling. There are unanswered questions. Has the policy shift from containment to regime change been mainly the result of the change in the US Administration? Would President Gore have followed a different policy? Are the consequences of military action likely to be more positive than negative?

Everyone in the House would have to concede that a powerful case could be made against any form of military action. There is no immediate casus belli as there was in Kuwait or Afghanistan. Serious concerns include the extent of civilian casualties and the fact that unilateral action would be a bad precedent.

We do not want a law of pre-emptive self-defence to be developed, as it could be highly dangerous. How long would the western powers retain the support of their electorates for military action? There is a danger of regional destabilisation, and might not chemical and biological weapons be used against Israel in an attempt to inflame the whole area? There is a danger of Iraq fragmenting. How long would the US be committed? Is there an exit strategy? Any successor regime that is seen to be a client regime of the USA could be unstable. There is also the possibility of long-term damage to relations between Arab states and the west: more terrorism, more hatred, more humiliation.

Equally, there are compelling arguments against inaction. As the Prime Minister cogently said, there is a threat and it has to be dealt with, and that may ultimately require military action. With all the doubts and uncertainties, Saddam Hussein remains a major problem. He is a master of deceit and delay. The claim that Iraq stopped the production of weapons of mass destruction after December 1998 is totally unrealistic, as the dossier shows.

How, then, do we respond? Any steps taken must clearly be through the United Nations. We need a new resolution with a stringent timetable. The credibility of the United Nations is clearly at stake.

Saddam Hussein has, as a criminal lawyer would say, form as long as your arm. Scepticism is amply justified. We can point to a long list of his previous acts of deception, and it seems that the game of cat and mouse is about to begin again. Already, he is apparently qualifying the "unconditional" offer of acceptance, and the dossier shows very clearly that he is already attempting to hide weapons and information from future inspectors. "Unconditional" should be non-negotiable. The goal is not just inspections but practical disarmament. We should keep our eye on the ball: disarmament and the removal of weapons of mass destruction, not regime change. That is a key difference between ourselves and our US team-mates.

There is of course concern about the US approach and the new doctrine of pre-emption. Is the US serious about dealing with weapons of mass destruction? If so, it would co-operate more with international arms control treaties. For example, we would like to see a more constructive attitude towards the protocol to the biological weapons convention. Is there a broad US strategy for the middle east?

On our own Government's role, the evidence is clear that the Prime Minister has been a key and positive influence—along with others, including Baker, Scowcroft and Secretary of State Powell—on the US President, persuading him to take the UN route, against considerable pressure from others in his entourage, even though it effectively means the President vacating the driving seat, and bringing him round to linking this with the middle east peace process, which he was not initially prepared to do.

The Government have a key role to play at the UN, drafting a resolution and building an international coalition. We must pursue the UN route realistically. I commend the Government on providing the dossier, which is a very British document, low-key and with no hyperbole, but sober and chilling. I also commend today's recall. Parliament and the public, especially given their considerable scepticism, must be very much a part of the debate. I am delighted that the Foreign Secretary is to appear before the Foreign Affairs Committee tomorrow, and that the Prime Minister is following the precedent of last September and is prepared to see—regularly, I hope—representatives of all the Select Committees.

This is a continuing process, and no action is immediately in contemplation. It is a dynamic situation, with many unknowns. We hope that some of those will

[Donald Anderson]

be clarified in the process. There is likely to be a considerable time before key questions on the military option arise. In the meantime, we should certainly concentrate on the UN route, with deliberation and with firm resolve, and we must ensure, as far as we can through diplomacy and the UN, that Saddam Hussein disarms.

2.6 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Towards the end of his statement, the Prime Minister robustly asserted the value of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America. There was much in what he said with which I agreed, but when the lives of British service men and women may be put at risk, it is neither anti-American to question the policies of the Bush Administration nor unpatriotic to question those of our own Government. Our ultimate duty is to those who send us to Parliament, not to the foreign policy of our allies, however sympathetic we may feel and however close our relations, both personal and strategic, may be.

These are complex matters, so I want to set out some of the principles that I shall try to use as a guide. No country should ever exclude the use of military force if that is the only way to protect the security and safety of its citizens, but as both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have already confirmed today, to be consistent with the principles of international law, war must be a last resort, after all other diplomatic and political alternatives have failed. There is no principle of international law that authorises regime change by means of military force. Indeed, article 2 of the UN charter expressly prohibits it.

All UN Security Council resolutions should carry equal weight, whether they impose unilateral or bilateral obligations. All members of the Security Council have a duty to see that those resolutions are carried out, and permanent members have a particular responsibility in that regard.

We can all agree—it has already been a measure of the debate—that Saddam Hussein is an evil tyrant with no regard for the sanctity of human life, for either his own citizens or the people of other countries. We all agree that he is in flagrant breach of a series of UN resolutions, and in particular those relating to his duty to allow the inspection, and indeed participate in the destruction, of his weapons of mass destruction. We can also agree that he most certainly has chemical and biological weapons and is working towards a nuclear capability. The dossier contains confirmation of information that we either knew or most certainly should have been willing to assume.

I hope that we can also agree that we have a moral and a legal obligation to test the validity of the stated unconditional offer of 16 September to allow the resumption of inspections. If I am correct in understanding the second to last paragraph of the foreword to the dossier, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) referred earlier, that, at least, is accepted by implication by Her Majesty's Government.

It may well be true that, legally, no new Security Council resolutions are required for the resumption of inspections. It may well be true that, legally, no new resolution is required for the use of force to implement resolution 687. Indeed, the existence of that authority was the only possible legal foundation for the actions taken in December 1998. However, I have no doubt that, from a political and a diplomatic point of view, a new United Nations resolution is essential.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I fully agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that we must explore the apparent offer of inspections. We cannot be in the position of not taking yes for an answer. However, does he agree that if some kind of military enforcement is needed, the choice is not necessarily between doing nothing and a full-scale invasion and regime change, and that it might be possible to threaten the destruction of specific sites to which we are not given access and where we believe weapons to be?

Mr. Campbell: As the hon. Gentleman remembers, the military action taken in December 1998 consisted of a sustained bombing campaign against those installations from which the inspectors had been excluded. That was thought to be appropriate and sufficient at the time. If we are driven to military action, a range of options is always possible.

Against the legal and factual background that I have set out, I believe that we are entitled to test Government policy and to ask questions to which the House and the public are entitled to have answers. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm what he has been reported to have said—that if unconditional, unfettered and effective inspections take place, military action will recede to the point of invisibility?

Where is the evidence that containment and deterrence have failed to the point at which military action is deemed necessary? Do the Government and the House agree that if a fraction of the resources that would be spent on military action had been spent on containment, containment might have been much more effective than it has been? On deterrence, where is the evidence that someone who has devoted his whole life to self-preservation would take action that would result in massive and inevitably fatal retaliation? Where is the evidence that Saddam Hussein now rejects the unequivocal assertion made by James Baker to Tariq Aziz on the eve of the Gulf war that if weapons of mass destruction were used, the response would be disproportionate?

What are the answers to those lethally eloquent questions of Mr. John Major last week, which, surprisingly, were not taken up today by the Leader of the Opposition? What is the exit strategy? Who will replace Saddam Hussein? How long would coalition troops be required to remain in Iraq? Will Iraq split up?

If, as is eloquently demonstrated by the dossier and if, as we are entitled to assume, Saddam Hussein has chemical and biological weapons, what assessment is being made of the likelihood that he would use them against attacking forces? What assessment is being made of the likelihood that he would use them against Israel? What would be the consequences for the stability of the middle east if Israel were attacked and felt compelled to respond with nuclear weapons?

These are not fanciful questions, nor are the anxieties that they convey confined to one party. They are felt by many of our constituents, as the correspondence that we have received in our postbags in the past few weeks confirms beyond any question.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): As we are in the game of asking questions for answers, perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman would answer a specific question. When the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) first made his position clear on the "Today" programme, he was pressed on a number of occasions to say whether he thought that military action was conceivable if Saddam Hussein did not comply fully with the UN resolutions. He refused point blank to accept such a prospect and kept saying that the only action was diplomatic. Today we hear from the right hon. and learned Gentleman that somehow the Liberal Democrats have slid across a position that they held earlier. Is not the real question the position of the Liberal Democrats with regard to military action?

Mr. Campbell: The transcripts of interviews on the "Today" programme speak for themselves. There is no doubt whatever about the position of the Liberal Democrats on this matter. If there is any question of military action, it is a matter of last resort when other diplomatic and political initiatives are removed.

If the right hon. Gentleman is now concerned about a willingness to commit British troops, let me remind him of the occasions when Lord Ashdown challenged the Government from the Liberal Democrat Benches to commit troops to Bosnia, to support the so-called safe havens of Srebrenica and was shouted down by the serried ranks of Conservative Members, most of whom are no longer in the House. Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman that when he and I were covering similar responsibilities, there was, shall we say, a certain reluctance on his part about Kosovo. Let me remind him that his Conservative spokesman said that we should not send a battalion of Gurkhas to East Timor.

When it comes to committing military force for clear political objectives, we will take no lessons from the right hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]* If he is so anxious about the anxieties that I have expressed, I suggest that he takes them up with the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) who, in an eloquent article in *The Spectator* last week, spoke, I suspect, for many in the House and in the country. The right hon. Gentleman might also discuss these anxieties with Sir Malcolm Rifkind and Lord Hurd, two distinguished former Conservative Foreign Secretaries. There will be some in the House and outside who, for strong moral reasons, are opposed to military action. We should recognise and respect that.

We must remember that the United Nations is not some third party to whom we have subcontracted our security responsibilities. It is no more and no less than the sum of its members.

We should also never forget that after Halabja in March 1998 and after the ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war in August 1998, in which Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons, the United Kingdom continued to allow credit facilities to Iraq for the purpose of arms-related equipment. If right hon. and hon. Members need any text or any foundation for that, I recommend that they read page 462 of volume I of the report of the inquiry conducted by Sir Richard Scott, as he then was.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will try to make progress.

It is not enough to question; one has an obligation on these occasions to set out the course of action that one would follow oneself. I believe that the stated willingness to admit inspectors must be tested, and in good faith. I believe that the Government should do everything in their power to see that inspection, destruction and disarmament can be made to work. However, I also believe that any new United Nations resolution must be framed in terms that are not deliberately designed to provoke. A new resolution should set deadlines for stages of inspection that are realistic and consistent with the technical programme of Hans Blix. If there is to be a new resolution, it must be in terms strong enough to allow the inspectors to go into every nook and cranny in Iraq, including the so-called presidential palaces. If, having fulfilled all those obligations and responsibilities, we have sought to implement Saddam's offer and he fails to meet deadlines or thwarts or obstructs inspections, military action may be necessary. If he repeats the previous pattern of behaviour, he will have lost the last shreds of any defence that he might have had against military action.

The Prime Minister was at pains not to link directly the middle east peace process with Iraq, but one does not have to go very far in Arab capitals before senior Government members raise the issue of the middle east peace process and link it to Iraq. The Prime Minister was right to say that the need for progress in the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians is vital for its own intrinsic worth, but we cannot escape the fact that, in the minds of many in the middle east, our failure to develop sufficient impetus behind that undermines any claim that we might have to sincerity over the matter of Iraq.

Mr. Salmond: I have followed the right hon. and learned Gentleman's comments closely and agree with much of what he has said. However, on his point about Iraqi non-compliance and military action being necessary, can he say who should decide at that point whether such action should be taken?

Mr. Campbell: It must be the United Nations, under its resolution. It must be responsible for determining whether the resolution has been breached and whether, in those circumstances, military action will be required. I am sorry that I did not spell that out, I thought it was implicit in what I had said.

Mr. Frank Cook: Would not that condition require the chief of the inspectors to report to the United Nations on this occasion, rather than to the United States?

Mr. Campbell: I thought that I had gone to some lengths to say that the question of whether deadlines were being met or whether inspections were free and unfettered must be for the technical judgment of Mr. Hans Blix, not the political judgment of others, who might have a different approach.

[Mr. Campbell]

I make my next point with a certain amount of reticence, but it is important to say that Mr. Sharon must be advised that any attempt to use the focus on Iraq as cover for illegitimate action against the Palestinians will not be tolerated. I believe that military action involving the United Kingdom should be endorsed by a substantive vote in the House of Commons before any of our forces are committed. In some senses it would be a constitutional innovation, leaving aside the Scottish National party's motion of some 10 years ago, but were I in the Prime Minister's position, I would welcome such a vote.

I do not shrink from the conclusion that military action may be required, but I am firmly of the view that it must be the last resort. It must be consistent with international law and must be authorised by the United Nations and endorsed by the House of Commons.

2.23 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I am sure that the Government will welcome the official Opposition's robust abstentions later today. Despite the rhetoric, there does appear to be, if not a consensus, a great deal of agreement on the basic principles on which the Government should proceed in the next few weeks or months or perhaps even early into next year.

In the many years that I have been in the House, there have been grave debates, usually at 10-year intervals—about the same as earthquakes in the west midlands. We had the Falklands in 1982, the Gulf war in 1991 and a cluster of wars around 2000. In almost every case there has been fundamental support from all political parties. There have been dissenters, and I wish to endorse the view that one should not disparage the opinions of those whose views differ from those of the official party leaderships, just as I hope that they will exercise the same acceptance of those who take a different view and interpret evidence in a different way.

I welcome today's document because it goes some way towards convincing the doubters—there are many—that there appear to be substantial grounds for taking firm action, whatever form that might take. I would prefer to proceed along the diplomatic route with the United Nations.

If we vote tonight, we will not be voting to endorse war. It would be a foolish person who would endorse a call to arms without proper discussion and rational consideration. It would be equally foolish to endorse the view that there should be no military action in any circumstances, unless one were a pacifist and deeply religious.

Conflict, if it takes place, is many months away. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) mentioned a number of principles that he would wish to examine, and any rational politician would do likewise. When the furore erupted five or six weeks ago I wanted to establish the criteria that I would look at closely, not because I had any particular influence but because I wanted to be satisfied about my view before being called on to say whether this country should go to war.

The first and most obvious criterion is that evidence must be presented that is sufficiently coherent and based on a wide variety of sources to prove that there is a threat, that Saddam has weapons of mass destruction, that he is acquiring more of them and that he has the intention of using them. I have gone some way towards being convinced of that, but there is still some way to go.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. George: I am sorry, but I do not have the time.

It is important that the Security Council expresses its view. I hope that it will be in favour of the argument that there must be strong and intrusive inspections. We must not see the Security Council as a bunch of platonic philosopher kings or a dozen Henry Fondas, who weigh up arguments rationally and perfectly and then deliver a judicially perfect judgment. Each country has its own agenda and will be motivated, through its representatives, to take a view that is more likely to reflect what its leadership requires than what is necessary for the international community. I hope that the United States is not simply pretending to go down the route of diplomacy and that it has a dual policy of putting pressure on Iraq by military mobilisation alongside persuasion through the United Nations.

Secondly, I hope that there will be a new resolution that will give the United Nations the authority that it requires for proper inspections by as many inspectors as are required. There should be no restriction on the inspectors' country of origin and they should have the right to roam anywhere they wish at any time. There must be an insistence that the inspectors will not be subverted while trying to carry out their instructions.

One has only to talk to inspectors or read their biographies or read the report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies or the report we have seen today to know that the inspectors were deceived, lied to and spied on. We know that evidence was concealed and redeployed, visits were blocked and documents were forged and that the inspectors were excluded and prevented from doing the job that they were instructed to undertake. Yet, despite that obstruction, they were able to do a reasonably good job. Surely we do not want the UN returning because Saddam Hussein said last week or his spokesman said a week ago, "Yes, come along and inspect", as subsequently he has laid down a number of caveats that show every sign of providing the kind of fatal obstacles that UN inspectors were forced to work around before they were unceremoniously booted out.

My third criterion was that there should be a credible military strategy with considerable thought given to what the consequences would be if war were undertaken and strong consideration given to post-operation peace support.

My fourth criterion was satisfied by what my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary said. Action must be taken to address and, we hope, resolve the crisis in Palestine and Israel. Although it is easy for people to say that there is no linkage between the two issues, in my opinion they are umbilically linked. Unless progress is made on that front, not only will it be wrong not to knock heads together diplomatically and politically, but there will be no likelihood of the middle east giving substantial or even modest support to any action that is taken. I believe that the Government have moved very strongly on that front.

Fifthly, I said six weeks ago that there should be a parliamentary debate and I am certainly satisfied in that respect. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said that there will be further debates and I am inclined to the view that some consideration should be given to providing more than simply a broad debate.

My sixth criterion was that George Bush Jr. should succeed his father in developing a formal and informal alliance. Not only is that desirable, but the alliance formed during the last Gulf war was imperative in providing legitimacy for military action as well as indicating that it was a world response.

We know that Saddam is hiding an arsenal of potentially lethal weapons. UNSCOM was unable to confirm the destruction of many biological and chemical armaments as inspectors were constantly blocked from entering sites, so now is the time for Saddam Hussein to prove once and for all to the international community that he is willing to work within the UN and to allow inspectors in soon, free from harassment. If that happens, and if he fears there will be rather stronger action if he does not accede, that will improve the likelihood of inspectors being allowed in and of weapons of mass destruction being identified and destroyed and—as I and most right hon. and hon. Members hope sincerely—that will be sufficient to justify the end of the game and there will be no requirement for military action. If it fails however, as the spokesman for the Opposition—or rather the third Opposition said—I fear that military action will be inevitable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

2.34 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): As my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) said, the central question that the House has to face is whether we are prepared to authorise war or a course of action likely to lead to war. I recognise that we can only make a judgment on the facts as they are known today. Those facts may change, and if they do, as individuals we must be ready to change our conclusions.

Facing the facts as they are known to the House today, I have come to the conclusion that war is not justified. My principal conclusion and the reason for that conclusion is that I do not think the threat we face is either sufficiently grave or sufficiently imminent to provide the moral basis for war. I shall develop that argument in a moment, but first let me say that I believe there are a number of practical, military, political and diplomatic objections to war, many of which were touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes in the questions that he posed.

I would like to illustrate the nature of those problems by raising a number of questions that I do not purport to be able to answer today. First, what is the military strategy, how many troops will be engaged, where are the bases and what are the military risks? Secondly, will the Arab states rally behind the purpose and provide bases for a coalition? Thirdly, what will Prime Minister Sharon do if Iraq attacks Israel? Fourthly, would Iraq survive as a unitary state, and if it seemed likely that Iraq would collapse, what would be the impact on regional stability in the middle east? How long would coalition forces have to remain in Iraq after an attack and, perhaps most profound of all, what is the likely impact on middle eastern opinion or perhaps on our wider relationship with the Islamic world if we commit ourselves to war?

I do not know the answers to those questions, but the probable answer to most of them raises a powerful case against war which only the most powerful arguments in a contrary sense would surely displace.

My real objection to war is a moral one. I do not believe now, looking at the evidence that we have, that there exists a moral justification for war and I do not wish to sanction a range of policies likely to lead to that event.

I am not a pacifist. I am a strong supporter of American engagement in world defence. I accept too that war, even pre-emptive war, can be justified. Proportionate self-defence accords with one's notions of international and national law, personal morality, and indeed, common sense.

For obvious reasons, I have to concede that at the time of the last Gulf war I was the Foreign Office Minister of State immediately responsible for departmental decisions concerning the middle east. In that capacity, I supported and participated in decisions that resulted in war. However, we must always keep in mind how terrible war can be. We have been extremely lucky in the conflicts of the past 20 years. In the Falklands, in the Gulf, in Yugoslavia and in Afghanistan the costs have been remarkably low, but when we authorise war we sanction action that may result in the deaths of thousands or in injury to many thousands of our own troops and citizens, but also to the Iraqis, in this case, many or perhaps even most of whom will be wholly innocent of blame.

If the concept of self-defence is to provide a moral justification for the giving of such authority, either the state against which that military action is being taken must have embarked on an act of aggression or there must be compelling evidence that such a state poses a grave and imminent threat of aggression either within its region, to its neighbours or to ourselves and our friends and allies.

We had to fight the second world war because of the German acts of aggression. The attack by what is now North Korea justified the action in Korea. We were right to use force in the Falklands, Kuwait and Afghanistan. To use another example, had the United States been aware of the Japanese carrier fleet sailing towards Pearl Harbour a pre-emptive strike would have been justified. Surely the nature of those illustrations where self-defence was invoked indicates how rare the cases really are. Surely we have to adhere closely to the proposition that we can invoke self-defence only when we face an act of aggression or it seems likely that one is imminent. Here we have to make a judgment and I am the first to admit that judgments in this sphere are extraordinarily difficult.

Saddam, as the dossier makes plain, is an evil, wicked man, an aggressor and a killer who has acquired weapons of mass destruction and has no moral inhibitions about using them. However, I do not think that he is irrational. He must know, and I believe that he does know, and he must understand, and I believe that he understands, the consequences to Iraq, himself and his regime if he uses force against his neighbours or the western alliance. Throughout the cold war we based our security on the concept of deterrence. Ultimately the Soviet Union collapsed. In this case, too, we should base our security on a concept of deterrence, not on a pre-emptive strike.

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

I have two final points to make. First, in a democracy public opinion will sustain a war only if the justification for it is overwhelmingly clear—so clear that the public will view the horror shown on their television screens being done in their name and comment, "It has to be done." I do not believe that public opinion will be satisfied that war in Iraq is justified. To lead a country into war without overwhelming public support seems not just wrong, but profoundly dangerous.

Secondly—this point follows on from what the Father of the House said and from what I have articulated here previously—in a democracy no Government should commit forces to war without the authority of this House expressed on a substantive motion, so that those who oppose war can seek to change the policy by their vote. To commit Britain to war relying on the royal prerogative and without the explicit authority of this House seems to be an affront to democracy.

2.43 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I echo what the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said about the affront to democracy. I shall set an example by making a speech which is much shorter than 10 minutes. It is in the form of a question, and it is apposite that a Minister from the Ministry of Defence should be answering this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and I have been much involved in the case of the Chagos islanders. Their lawyers told us of a problem with the Ilois returning to Diego Garcia because of the building of six huge temperature-controlled hangars. We were asked what we would do to protest to the Government about that. We asked what the hangars were for. Apparently they are for B52 bombers and, particularly, B2 bombers that have to be repaired and maintained in a particular temperature. Why does one have B2 bombers? It is particularly to carry earth-penetrating nuclear weapons, specifically the B61-11.

My question, which I hope will be addressed in the reply, is this: we are talking about a British base, the British Indian Ocean Territory, of which Diego Garcia is a part and which is a House of Commons responsibility. The House of Commons should be told if nuclear weapons, albeit tactical, earth-penetrating nuclear weapons to destroy bunkers—one can understand why the American air force may wish to have this particular weapon in relation to Iraq—are to be launched from British soil, with or without agreement by the United States air force. We should be told in the winding-up speech tonight.

2.45 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I have only a few points to make and I shall endeavour to be brief.

First, the issue is not about human rights in Iraq. The Foreign Secretary made great play of them and the dossier covers them. We need no persuading that Saddam Hussein's regime is about the most evil in the world today. It has committed atrocities on a scale unseen almost anywhere else, but that does not justify armed intervention in Iraq. If I may say so, it is something of a red herring. The debate is about something wider, more important and of greater application to the world outside Iraq.

Secondly, there can be no controversy about the evidence that Saddam Hussein has developed, and is continuing to develop apace, weapons of mass destruction. The dossier, which puts forward the evidence in a calm and measured way, makes the case conclusively. Surely that can no longer be a matter of dispute.

Thirdly, does Saddam having and developing such weapons amount to a threat sufficient in immediacy and gravity to justify armed military intervention, even as a last resort? As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said in a powerful, lucid and cogent speech—I am afraid that I did not agree with much of it—the threat issue is a matter of judgment. Everyone has to make their judgment about the gravity and immediacy of that threat.

We must look at other countries that have developed weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, and ask ourselves what it is that distinguishes Iraq from, for example, India, Pakistan or even Iran. The answer is that there is clear evidence from the history of the Saddam Hussein regime that it is fundamentally an aggressive regime. He has developed these weapons, not as an instrument of deterrence to deter attacks on Iraq, but as weapons of aggression. In the past 20 years, the regime has twice invaded its neighbours. On a number of occasions, it has launched ballistic missiles against neighbouring states. It is not a regime under external threat that has developed these weapons to create a mutual deterrence, as is the case with India and Pakistan—regrettably, perhaps, but one can understand the reason for them doing so. Those considerations do not apply to Iraq.

In my judgment, this threat is clear, serious and present enough to justify decisive intervention by the international community in whatever shape that takes to enforce a disarmament of the regime.

My fourth point is about the threat to the stability of the middle east and was raised by my right hon. and learned Friend and others. We should be very clear about this: the greatest threat to the stability of the middle east is Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction. Quite apart from the actual attacks that he has mounted against his neighbours in the past 20 years, the fact that he consistently sponsors suicide attacks by Palestinians helps to prevent the peace process that we all yearn to be restarted from resuming. It is hard to see how the successful disarming and removal of Saddam Hussein can do anything other than contribute to the stability of the middle east.

Of course, the same concerns were expressed before the Gulf war, 12 years ago, but in fact the successful conclusion of the Gulf war was the trigger for the start of the Oslo process—

Mr. Galloway: Where is it now?

Mr. Maude: Sadly, it has come to a halt, but there has been massive progress in that time. There is not the chasm that existed between the positions of Israelis and Palestinians at that time. Unfortunately, the movement has, been insufficient, but there has been movement and that has created greater stability in the region.

My fifth point relates to the legitimacy of potential military intervention. I earnestly hope that there will be a further Security Council resolution, to test out the offer—if we can call it such—that Saddam Hussein has made to allow in inspectors without conditions, but such a resolution is worth while only if it allows the sincerity of that offer to be tested very quickly indeed, with very specific conditions. It must set out specific locations, which must be open to inspection in a completely unfettered way, very quickly—in a matter of weeks rather than months, or at most of very, very few months. A Security Council resolution that permitted Saddam Hussein a prolonged period in which he could exercise his undoubted skills of procrastination, which diffused and dissipated the will in the international community to enforce the already settled resolutions of the United Nations, would be a grave mistake. If no such resolution can be procured, I believe that the existing resolutions, if they are further ignored and obstructed, would legitimise military enforcement by the international community. That international community may, I concede, consist of no more than the United States and the United Kingdom, but it would be acting not in the interests of American imperialism, as was rather offensively suggested yesterday, but genuinely in the interests of upholding the will of the international community as already expressed in United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: I have only a moment left and I have another point to make, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

My final point is about that relationship with the United States. I do not believe that British foreign policy should be a pale reflection of American foreign policy, I do not believe that the Prime Minister should be, in that rather offensive phrase, a poodle of the American President, and I do not believe that the current Prime Minister is behaving in that way. But I do believe that it is a completely legitimate aim of British foreign policy to uphold and support what has been the most important relationship for security and peace in the modern world. Unhelpful references to imperialism—particularly coming, as they did, from people who only recently were lamenting American isolationism—gravely damage that relationship.

I hope, as everyone does, that it will be possible for military intervention to be avoided, but I believe that if the will of the international community, through the Security Council resolutions, continues to be ignored and obstructed, the House should steel itself to do what it has always been ready to do in such circumstances, which is to accept the use of military force to enforce those resolutions.

2.55 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Looking around the House today, I see relatively few Members who were present when I spoke in a previous debate resulting from the recall of Parliament. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley), who at the time represented Hammersmith, and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who were there. That was on Saturday 3 April 1982, as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow will recall.

On that occasion we were debating the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands and the then Tory Government's decision to use military force to regain them. I was one of the very few Members, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow, who then opposed sending the taskforce. In the debate, I said:

"I am against the military action for which so many have asked because I dread the consequences that will befall the people of our country and the people of the Falkland Islands."—[*Official Report*, 3 April 1982; Vol. 21, c. 661.]

I think that my hon. Friend will recall that some years later, when I was an Opposition foreign affairs spokesperson, I vigorously opposed the United States' invasion of Grenada. Given the same circumstances, I would do exactly the same on both occasions again. Therefore my predisposition has been, and still is, to oppose military force unless there remains no alternative, and I have not been uncritical of the United States on a number of occasions when I thought it justified.

I also recognise, however, that we need to learn from experience. It can be argued that in both Argentina and Grenada the return of multi-party democracy was at least in part due to the military intervention. I wish that some of my hon. Friends had the humility to enable them to learn from the past. For example, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) said so eloquently in a previous debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow was spectacularly wrong in his dire predictions on Kuwait, Kosovo and Afghanistan, so why is he more likely to be right now in his judgment on Iraq? A few—I am glad that it is just a few—of my hon. Friends seem more willing to accept the word of a dictator, who has twice invaded his neighbours and who has gassed to death thousands of his own people, than that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the leader of our party. I find it astonishing, and it smacks of ulterior motives.

I accept, however, that there are genuine concerns, which have been expressed by, among others, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short), the Secretary of State for International Development.

I came to this debate with four specific concerns. First, I share the view that the United Nations Security Council should be centrally involved in the debate on action against Saddam. But, as we heard earlier, that is exactly what our Government have been in the forefront of ensuring. Secondly, I believe that an all-out military invasion must be seen as a last resort. Incidentally, there are many ways in which our forces can be mobilised short of an all-out military invasion. The mere hint of the threat of force has already resulted in Saddam's first concession. To keep the dictator to his word and to move him forward, that pressure must be maintained, not withdrawn.

Thirdly, I hope that the Government will take a further initiative to prepare for the situation in Iraq when Saddam finally goes, by whatever means. The Iraqi people have suffered too much already, and they deserve at least a chance of a decent Government when the dictator goes.

My final concern, which has been expressed by others, is that we give as much attention to bringing justice to the Palestinians as we are now devoting to Iraq. I know, from

[Mr. George Foulkes]

my visit to the Israeli Labour party conference, and from my discussions with the Prime Minister—he also said so again today—that there is greater determination in both to achieve a peaceful solution in the middle east than they are often given credit for. We shall all be able to give more time and greater attention to that when we are rid of the Iraqi dictator and his threat to us all.

As my four concerns have been met by the Foreign Secretary and by the Prime Minister today, I give my full, wholehearted support to the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Foulkes: I have not finished yet; I have got a few more minutes.

My support is certainly more wholehearted than the Opposition's, but I want to say one last word about media coverage. After my premature exit from the Government in May, I was approached on two or three occasions by the "Today" programme. When those involved found out that I was not critical of the Government, like some other ex-Ministers, I heard no more from them. Last week, the *Financial Times* asked my view on Iraq, but it never appeared in its report—too supportive of the Government, no doubt.

No doubt, once again, it will be the usual suspects who hit the headlines and, no doubt, that will delight them. Whether it is innate anti-Americanism—there is some—whether it is a grievance against the Government because of ambitions thwarted or cut short, or whether it is a love of the limelight, there is no excuse for giving comfort to the dictator and making it more likely that he uses the chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. If, by their action, they halt or even delay action to stop Saddam and, as a result, he causes death and destruction once again, it must be on their consciences.

3.1 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I sympathise with the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) about his blackout from the "Today" programme. I also thought that his departure from the Government was premature, although I am not sure about that after his speech. May I tell him that there would be no dissent across the House if this debate were about Saddam Hussein's being a vile and murderous dictator? There would be complete agreement on that, and that is true across all the parties among those who have real concerns about the direction in which the Prime Minister seems to be going.

Some of us opposed Saddam Hussein's vile regime when he was the blue-eyed boy of successive United State's Administrations, supported, armed and financed in pursuing his assault on Iran. The House may also recall that British Ministers and companies did not have clean hands either. The United States may have provided Saddam Hussein with weapons, hardware and military intelligence, but as Sir Richard Scott reminded us, previous Conservative Governments misled the House about the United Kingdom's dubious record on arms sales to Iraq. Nor is the debate for most people about whether Saddam Hussein should be persuaded or forced to give up weapons of mass destruction.

The Prime Minister's much delayed dossier describes evidence of wish, intent and enormous cruelty, although not of immediate capability in nuclear weapons or, indeed, of links with international terrorism, even though at least some people in the United States said initially that that was the pretext for action. However, the real debate in my view turns on what does or what does not constitute a United Nations mandate or sanction for action. That is why this crisis is not only hugely important for every one of us in itself, but for the future.

Those who flout the will of the international community—whether Israel in Palestine, India in Kashmir, or even the United States itself in relation to the International Criminal Court—often have recourse to the idea that international agreements, even those involving the United Nations itself, are not really worth the paper they are written on. That is a totally cynical attitude.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister came close to describing the UN as such during his Sedgefield news conference on 3 September, when he said, rightly in my view, that it is better to take action with the broadest possible base of international support. However, he then went on to say that military action could be taken anyway. As the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) has said, those are dangerous words. That was boiled down to its essence by the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) a few minutes ago, when he explicitly said that the international community could comprise the United States and the United Kingdom. I have absolutely no doubt that that is also the Prime Minister's view, but it is highly significant that he did not make that explicit in his statement earlier today.

In many ways a gung-ho campaign of regime change in Iraq, without the explicit sanction of the Security Council, would be just as foolish and just as damaging in its consequences as the west's covert but extensive support for Saddam Hussein some 20 years ago. I do not think that we should rest on the murky and self-defeating doctrine of "my enemy's enemy is my friend". For many of us, the UN still possesses real potential to give order to international affairs.

The shadow Foreign Secretary said that we must not place too much faith in the UN. Well, some of us—not just in the House, but across the world—still place enormous faith in the UN's capability. There is no reason since the end of the cold war why UN action cannot be effective, as indeed it was 12 years ago in the first Gulf war. Indeed, if the US had not taken action under article 51 last year—it was entitled to do so because its nation was under attack—but had opted for an explicit Security Council motion in relation to defeating international terrorism, I have absolutely no doubt that the international community would have given its assent to pursuing the campaign.

There is no evidence that the UN is permanently immobilised; nor does the UN Security Council consist of the five permanent members, something that I sometimes read in the press. There are 15 nations on the UN Security Council, currently including the small European nations of Ireland and Norway. Before I came to the House today, I had a quick scan through the press comments in those Security Council nations, and I should like to inform the House of what has been said in those countries and how distant it is from some of the attitudes of the United States Administration—and, indeed, some of those in the United Kingdom Cabinet.

There is an expectation in those countries that arms inspectors will return to Iraq. There is no assumption that access will be unfettered initially or that it is all going to be easy, but there is a determination and expectation that further action will be required if that access is denied. There is, however, widespread disbelief that, even while we are going through that process, there may be the risk of unilateral action by the United States, supported by the Prime Minister, to enforce UN resolutions when the UN itself has not sanctioned that action.

In this debate so far, the issue was best expressed by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who spoke for the Liberal Democrat party. He went through the process of legality and, in particular, unveiled the fudge, which I detected from those on the Government Benches earlier, about who should suggest the use of force if all else failed. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's answer was clear: it should be the UN Security Council. Only it can act on behalf of the international community—the real international community, not the bilateral international community.

The worst-case scenario if that is not done is a near armageddon, unrest in the Arab world, the disruption of Saudi oil supplies and the entire world economy, and the possible extension of the conflicts in Israel and perhaps Pakistan. Even if that were avoided, on a best-case scenario, such action would be problematic, costly in human life—Iraqi civilians and our armed forces—and the stability of the world economy.

Dr. Palmer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: I am sorry, but I do not have time to give way now.

Presumably, the Prime Minister has an eye on the stock market, the oil markets, and people's concerns about their pensions, their jobs and the lives of their sons and daughters in the armed forces.

Of course genuine multilateral action, sanctioned by the UN Security Council, also carries risks and costs in human life, but it is inherently more containable, and upholding the rule of international law has long-term dividends.

Of course it is possible that the Prime Minister and the American President are playing a game of brinkmanship—talking tough to ensure a peaceful solution. The trouble is that they could just topple over the edge, and take us all with them. The House had better acknowledge that there is substantial public scepticism and distrust of the American President's motivations—indeed even of those of the British Prime Minister. I hope that some of the base motives, some of which were referred to earlier by Labour Members, are not the real reason for the countenancing of unilateral, as opposed to genuinely international, action. However, I wish to offer another thought to the House. Might it be that in the aftermath of last year's attack on the twin towers—the atrocity—much of American opinion, but by no means all of it, is still in shock because of that atrocity? Might not many people across the world still be desperately anxious to support America, as our solidarity last year demonstrated?

I note that yesterday Mr. Rumsfeld said that Chancellor Schroeder's comments were poisoning the relationship between Germany and the United States. Is it not rather more possible that some of Mr. Rumsfeld's comments are poisoning the relationship between America and the rest of the world?

Might it not be true that, at this particular moment, with so much at stake for all of us, what America desperately needs is a candid friend to tell the truth, not a cheerleader willing to pay a "blood price"?

3.10 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): I share the scepticism expressed about the motives of President Bush, but we have been asked in this debate to focus on the Prime Minister's belief that Saddam Hussein has developed weapons of mass destruction and what should be done about it.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have made it clear that the Government have two aims: first, to ensure the return of United Nations inspectors to Iraq; and secondly, to ensure the destruction of any weapons of mass destruction discovered by the inspectors. They have also made it clear that they believe that the threat of military action should be used to achieve those aims, but those aims and that threat raise two questions which the Government have yet to answer in this debate. First, when should the decision to use military action be taken? Secondly, who should take the decision that military action is necessary?

The answer to the first question must be that no decision can or should be taken until we know the response of Saddam Hussein to United Nations' insistence, expressed in a new resolution, on the return of UN inspectors—or, if they return, until we know the results of those inspections. A decision cannot and must not be taken in advance. We should take care—the Government should take care—that any new UN resolution does not contain any loose words or phraseology that could be used or abused at some time in the future and without any reference to the UN to authorise or to claim authority for military action that was not intended by the UN.

As for who should authorise military action, I share the view expressed by several Members in this debate that the decision to do so should be taken by the Security Council of the United Nations. It is not enough for the decision to be taken by one man—not even President Bush, or perhaps especially President Bush. The United Nations should decide whether the inspectors' findings, and Iraq's response or lack of it to them, justify the use of military action. Of course United Nations resolutions should be enforced, but the method of enforcement should be specifically authorised by the UN Security Council and not determined by a self-appointed vigilante.

This question and the answer to it are important because President Bush made it clear in his speech to the United Nations—and those authorised to speak on behalf of his Administration have also made it clear in their statements—that he believes that the President of the United States, with at most the authority of the US Congress, is entitled to take the decision to enforce UN resolutions. I do not agree; I think that a lot of Members do not agree with President Bush's position. I hope that our Government do not agree either and will make it clear to the United States that it is not acceptable to many of us that it should take such decisions alone and without the authority of the United Nations.

3.14 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I wholeheartedly support the position taken from the Front Bench by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). I particularly pay tribute to the brave speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), who spoke so powerfully about his objections to going to war. I should add that many of us in the House would profoundly agree with the admirable speech of the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes).

The House should have been recalled some time ago in order to discuss these matters. Britain is not a country lost in some futile pacifist dream. This is a mature democracy, whose people have every right to be told in a timely manner the truth about the reality of the great issues that must be dealt with, and whose long history, fortified and sustained over many years by the experiences of many similar hard and difficult days, should have absolutely required the Government of the day to have had the confidence to produce all the information at least six weeks ago, as well as to recall Parliament earlier.

Many of my constituents and my friends are truly affronted by the Government's patronising impertinence in not coming before Parliament much earlier to make a perfectly good, sound case, as the Prime Minister did this afternoon. That task has been made much harder by their ineptness and by the bellicose rumblings of our allies, which are now mercifully more suitably directed.

However, I congratulate the Prime Minister, the Government and British diplomacy on the role that they have together played in persuading our allies of the essential requirement to obtain United Nations backing to deal with this matter. Indeed, President Bush was—admirably—right in his speech to the United Nations when he asked whether it was truly prepared to see the UN's will flouted and wronged and cast aside, and whether the authority and credibility of the UN were to be trampled in the dust or upheld. If that authority and credibility is not upheld, there will be anarchy and the UN's credibility will be destroyed for ever.

Ultimately, any foreign policy or established international order that allows a country such as Iraq to acquire and retain weapons of mass destruction while violating solemn UN and other guarantees and agreements is in breach of all its obligations and is a guarantee of a world on the edge of greater terrors to come. This matter must now be brought to a conclusion in order to prevent what President Bush rightly called the gravest possible danger to our freedom, which lies at the crossroads of terrorism and technology. We must have a clear and unequivocal new UN resolution, containing obligations of absolute crystal clarity, fortified by a non-negotiable timeline and with the clear message that, if Iraq defaults, steps will immediately and effectively be taken to force it to remove and destroy all illegal weapons.

As we all know, however, there will be the most tremendous consequences to all this. There will be the welcome liberation of the people of Iraq from an appalling and cruel regime. Huge effort will be required to bring stability to that country. There will be the unavoidable requirement—I welcome the fact that it has been much echoed in this debate—for the United States, Europe and all nations of good will to press ahead with resolving the Palestinian question and seeing to the future security of Israel. There will have to be a commitment from all involved to a new strand of policy to start achieving democratisation, greater freedom and prosperity throughout the Muslim world and in particular stability among our friends in the Gulf.

What the Arab world needs particularly—and if there is indeed as a result of these actions to be regime change in Iraq—is a model that works: a progressive Arab regime that by its very existence would create pressure and inspiration for a gradual democratisation and modernisation around the whole region. That would provide an engine to deal with the widespread poverty, ignorance, repression and humiliation that form the lethal cocktail driving Islamic extremism, especially among the young, and whose consequences remain such a terrible danger to us all.

We are living at a time when we cannot predict, as we did in the cold war, how the enemy will react or behave. We face a number of undetectable threats for which we will have no warning. Given what we know of the Iraqi regime and its weapons, and given the necessity to uphold the authority of the United Nations, we must press on and deal with this issue by acting and operating, as Britain always has, within the full authority of international law. This is no time for us to avoid the hard choices that have always placed Britain alongside her allies in doing what is right and necessary.

3.20 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): It is a pity that the House was not recalled earlier and it is a bigger pity that we will not be permitted a vote on a substantive motion today.

The biggest pity of all is that the dossier—the dance of the seven veils—finally came to light just a couple of hours before this debate began. Many of us would have liked the opportunity to check with our sources many of the claims that are in the Prime Minister's dossier. I have just done that with that well-known Saddamist organ, *The Daily Telegraph* whose foreign correspondent was awaiting my call so that I could read him the places mentioned in the dossier. He and other British correspondents then climbed into a waiting car and proceeded immediately to the very venues mentioned in the dossier. Therefore, we perhaps will not have to wait for at least a preliminary report or for the inspectors to go back in a couple of weeks. *The Daily Telegraph* will tell us tomorrow and give us at least a preliminary idea whether the statements made in the dossier are pulp fiction or have some validity. I hope that we will not get into the situation in which Groucho Marx found himself in that great movie "A Day at the Races". As a horse doctor posing as a top physician, he was finally debunked and forced to fall back on the phrase, "Who are you going to believe—me or those crooked X-rays?"

The truth is that the inspectors—not people with a propaganda interest in drawing up dossiers—are the only people who can be trusted with this information. We will have the inspectors back soon enough unless President Bush makes good on his threat last Thursday to block their return unless the Security Council toes his line.

However, if this were really about the return of the inspectors and weapons of mass destruction, we could all go home and we would not have to divide the House this evening when many Members will vote for us and many

more will abstain. However, everyone knows that the issue is not whether the inspectors are going back and whether disarmament can proceed. The issue is whether this Government are prepared to join a pre-emptive attack on Iraq by the United States that is not sanctioned by the UN Security Council.

I tell the Government that there are two problems with that approach. The first is the leadership qualities of George W. Bush. The Prime Minister tells us, as George Bush himself might put it, that we have been misunderestimating the President. The problem with that view is that the British people have seen and heard the President and they think they are estimating him just about right as not a man whom we would want to be at the wheel of the car as we drive along the edge of a cliff with ourselves sitting in the back seat.

Are we misunderestimating the President's friends? Are we misunderestimating Donald Rumsfeld whose picture appeared in *The Guardian* the other day shaking hands with Saddam Hussein in the middle of the Iran-Iraq war after he had just handed over the latest American satellite surveillance equipment so that the Iraqi regime could better target the Iranians who were our foes in that war? Are we misunderestimating Paul Wolfowitz, a man who used to make even Ronald Reagan's blood run cold? Are we misunderestimating the Vice-President, Dick Cheney, a man who voted in the United States Congress against the resolution for the release of Nelson Mandela from prison?

I am principally speaking to my friends and I have to tell them how much more comforting it is to be on the side of Nelson Mandela in this argument than it is for some of them to be on the side of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and George W. Bush. I ask Labour Members how we ended up on George Bush's side of an argument with Al Gore, the Democrats' presidential candidate. Would it not have been better if new Labour had strengthened the new Democrats or even the peace party within the Republicans rather than siding with Cheney, Rumsfeld and Bush?

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Galloway: No. How do my friends feel having to say that Al Gore is wrong and that George W. Bush is correct? [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I do not have time to give way in a time-limited speech.

My friends have to answer why they are on George W. Bush's side of the argument and not on the side of Gerhard Schröder, the leader of the German Social Democrats, our sister party in the Socialist International.

Mr. Hendrick *rose—*

Mr. Galloway: The second problem is even more substantial. The British people instinctively know that adding another war to the middle east where there are quite enough wars already does not seem like a sensible idea. People see the Israel that the Foreign Secretary told us had received new instructions from the Security Council last night demolishing brick by brick the solemn commitments in the Oslo agreement. They see the bulldozers, like some prehistoric animal, tearing down President Arafat's compound.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) *rose—*

Mr. Galloway: The British people saw on the news this morning that nine Palestinians were killed just last night in just one city in Gaza. They see the devastation and the flames in Palestine, the unresolved conflicts in Afghanistan and the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism and hatred against the west and they instinctively know that it is extremely unlikely that the world can be made a safer place by launching yet another war in that region—a war of 60 days and nights of intensive carpet bombardment followed by 250,000 western soldiers invading and occupying an Arab Muslim country. The British people instinctively know that that does not sound like a recipe for security and peace in the world or like a recipe for the diminution of terrorism.

The Prime Minister used a rather chilling phrase in his introduction. He talked about chemical weapons causing a painful and excruciating death, as indeed they do. That is why some of us were outside the Iraqi embassy demonstrating against the brutality of the Iraqi regime when British Ministers—the previous Government's Minister's—and business men were inside the embassy selling the Iraqi regime guns and gas.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Untrue.

Mr. Galloway: If Members read the Scott report, they will see just how true that is.

The fact is that innocent Iraqi civilians will die in their thousands if this war goes ahead. They include the children who are even now terrified every night before they go to sleep about when the dive bombers will come. Siamese twins were born at the weekend in Baghdad. Usually when Siamese twins are born we start discussing which of the two unfortunates is going to have to die so that the other one may live. Pretty soon, George Bush, in a bizarre King Solomon-like decision, may well decide that both of them have to die. The question is, is Britain going to be with them?

3.30 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We have just heard a vintage speech which has raised the temperature of the House—it may have been more of a rant than a logical argument.

We may have forgotten that while a high percentage of people in Iraq may be from the Muslim community, the Iraqi Government are not—they were recently described to me as a secular socialist Government—so I believe that many people in the region would be glad to see them changed. How that change comes about only time will tell. We are fortunate to be able to debate those issues here and express diverse views knowing that none of us will be taken away afterwards to the Tower of London to await trial. Unfortunately, dissidents in Iraq face an immediate sentence from a man who gave permission to his in-laws to return, apparently granting them safe conduct, only to execute them himself. We in Northern Ireland have faced a similar situation. A distinguished politician gave permission to a woman to bring her son back to Londonderry, then ordered his execution. That is the world we are living in.

None of us should take the moral high ground because we are all culpable. People point a finger at one another, but we must face the fact that Governments have very few friends—they have only interests. Some people have spent a long time attacking the Americans and George Bush but we would do well to remember that we are in this state

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

today because in the Gulf war the armed forces followed the United Nations resolution, and ceased to pursue the republican guard and others and complete their campaign. The UN resolution was just to liberate Kuwait.

I know something of the problems because my Kurdish friends have concerns, which have been expressed this afternoon, about what happens if Saddam Hussein is deposed. Bearing in mind that the main purpose of action is to destroy weapons of mass destruction, his deposal is another matter, but it will be up to his own people sooner or later. I remember the Kurds telling me that they were concerned about what might happen after his deposal, so we should think ahead to the end, and not just the beginning, of a campaign. Most of us would be happy if the UN reached a security agreement that allowed things to be done lawfully, but it has been argued here today that the law regularly requires force for its implementation. If it cannot be enforced, we will be in a situation I have often described. A Belfast housewife is annoyed because she sees her child misbehaving in front of people in the street and says, "Wait until I get you home—I'll murder you." The youngster just smiles because he knows that getting home is all that will happen—there will not even be a rebuke.

None of us should therefore pride ourselves on the use of force. The nub of the argument is who will use it. When the UN makes such a declaration, it relies to a large extent on the British-United States axis and allies to form an enforcement body. We would be delighted if others joined us, but the hard core will be composed of those of us who espouse and enjoy democracy. Yes, we have made mistakes. Early in the debate, the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney) said that we who believe in the force of evil may take a certain line. There was some laughter, as if it was strange to discuss that concept in a political arena. The tragedy is that because the evil in all of us is not under control at times, the Saddams of the world arise. Frankly, I cannot understand how we can attain moral authority if we shilly-shally about the way in which world Governments work together to deal with that problem.

In that context, let me pose a question. Perhaps because I am a child of the 1930s, I remember the debates in the old Chamber which was destroyed by Hitler's bombing. I remember British statesmen and politicians travelling the world saying that we should not deal with him—some even took that line during the war. We should be honest. Some of our American friends say that they declared war on Germany, but they did not. Certainly, some of them helped us freely and voluntarily at the outset, but the United States only entered the conflict when Germany declared war on it after Pearl Harbour.

When do the members of the free world, with their undertakings to help one another, begin to act? Do we wait until another 1 million people perish, as happened in Poland, before we accept that we have international obligations? None of us want war—only fools do—but sooner or later we may have to face that possibility. The House should at least give the Government its blessing as they co-operate with their allies in the UN and elsewhere to try to do something positive to free the world from the menace of weapons of mass destruction and, perhaps, the madman who will use them.

3.37 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): There are two things that we know for certain in our debate. First, a common theme in many speeches has been that Saddam Hussein is a repressive, inhumane dictator dedicated to retaining and expanding his own power. Secondly, we know that he has been, and may well still be, developing chemical, biological and possibly nuclear weapons.

Precisely at what stage that development is remains unclear. Today's dossier helps a little, but it does not resolve the issue. We should, however, accept that there is a desire to attain such weapons. It is undoubtedly true that the world would be a safer place—we would all be safer—if we could ensure that Saddam Hussein, with his history, track record, ambitions and grip on internal power, did not have access to weapons of mass destruction. That much is incontestable, but how best do we, the international community, secure that aim? That is the question that we need to address and discuss, and it should be the focus of our debate.

Two choices immediately follow that question. First, is our aim the eradication and decommissioning of weapons of mass destruction, or is it what has become known as regime change? One thing that has emerged from today's discussions—probably the most valuable thing to emerge so far—has been a crystal clear statement from the Prime Minister that the focus of our activity is weapons of mass destruction, not regime change. I very much welcome that statement.

The second choice is whether the process of securing the decommissioning and destruction of weapons of mass destruction will be carried out through the United Nations and with international agreement, or will be a United States-led exercise alone.

It has been absolutely right to take the issue to the UN, and for any role that our Prime Minister has played—as I believe that he almost certainly has—in persuading the United States to do so he deserves the gratitude of us all. But do not we hear many voices in the United States Administration saying that they will take military action anyway? Here lies the great danger.

Going to the UN means doing this properly. It means building step by step, with care but with determination, an international consensus, using that to bring pressure, drawing support from the Arab states across the region—not assuming the right to take action, announcing the intention to do so and then seeking UN approval as a cipher for something already decided.

America is a great nation. Its willingness to use force at times in the past 100 years, not just in its own defence but in the cause of humanity, has served us all across the globe. Where would the people of Bosnia, the people of Kosovo, or, now, the people of Afghanistan be without it? But that does not mean that every decision made by this American President, and every goal announced by his Secretary of Defence, is necessarily right.

Let us grieve with the people of the United States for the losses that it suffered just over a year ago. Let us thank the United States for its engagement with causes of justice around the world, let us be resolute with it to bring an end to terrorism wherever it may be, but let us test this proposition about Iraq against the evidence, against the shared aims of the international community, and against the need for a stable world.

I say to my own Government, in all candour, if, as it may well do, it comes down to a choice between a UN-led, UN-decided process and a decision to deploy force inspired by the US President alone, our cause must surely lie with the international community and the UN.

Let us remember what the consequences might be of a US-led, US-inspired attack on Iraq with perhaps only Britain and one or two others alongside. First, there is the sheer military difficulty of the operation. This is not an easy "drop a few bombs and then walk away" exercise. It is difficult, dangerous and risky.

Secondly, there are the humanitarian consequences. The loss of innocent civilian life in any serious conflict is likely to be huge. Indeed, it may be deliberately engineered to be so by Saddam Hussein himself, but that does not negate the point.

Thirdly, there are the real dangers of regional instability, what might happen in such an event—an attack on Israel by Saddam Hussein followed by reprisals; an end to any remnants of hope for a new peace process between Israel and Palestine; uprisings in other Arab states where Governments are perceived to be too pro-American in their attitude; new repression in others; the turning of Saddam Hussein, bizarrely, into a hero for millions across the Arab world; the fracturing—undoubtedly—of the coalition against terrorism so painstakingly built up a year ago, including by our own Prime Minister?

All of those are potential—indeed probable—consequences of an American go-it-alone decision to attack without the broadest possible international agreement and specific endorsement of the UN.

Again, I say to my own Government, with all the sincerity that I can:

"Do not go gentle into that good night".

3.46 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): In the 19 years that I have been a Member of the House, I have not sought to speak in the debates that have preceded this country's military excursions. That is mostly because, like everybody else, I have a great reluctance to support causes of war, but I am sometimes persuaded that war is necessary in order to achieve peace, stability and the liberation of oppressed peoples. I hope that I remain somebody who listens to the argument and wants to hear a persuasive case.

The dossier produced and sincerely presented by the Prime Minister makes a persuasive case for the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. I share the view that we, the international community, must confront that threat, not pretend that it is not there. However, I would have grave concerns if we were drawn into a situation where the rule of international law was brought into question.

We are moving into a new era where the doctrine of deterrence is being changed to the legitimisation of pre-emptive strikes, possibly even pre-emptive nuclear strikes. At no time since the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has any of us in the western alliance ever supported pre-emptive strikes. This is a massive change of tactic and one that I reject but that, in any case, cannot be taken on the instigation of one politician in one country, however powerful that country is. That is something that we must address.

I was one of a number of British politicians—not only Ministers but members of all political parties—who attended the earth summit in Johannesburg. It is important to share with the House the feeling of anger and resentment felt by the 21,500 people at that summit who were trying to find ways to give the poorest people on earth the possibility of real improvements in their quality of life by the developed world agreeing to create space for them to do so. That anger was the result of the American President not being there while his civil servants were specifically there to block agreements and were successful in doing so. Not only that, but the media daily broadcast speeches from the American Administration making the case for a war against Iraq at a time when 109 nations and their Heads of Government were gathered to try to create a platform for peaceful development in the future. The juxtaposition was ironic in the extreme.

The hon. Members for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) referred to the fact that the former Vice-President and presidential candidate of the United States, Al Gore, made a powerful speech yesterday, in which he said that he feared that America was squandering the good will that had been built up around the world since 11 September to defeat terrorism and the threat of terrorism, by treating the United Nations with a degree of contempt.

I give credit to the Prime Minister for the influence that he has apparently exerted on the President to go to the United Nations. I also believe that the President made an effective speech there, but it has been seriously undermined by what has been said since by other members of his Administration, using the language of a John Wayne wild west movie: "We're going to hunt him down and we're going to get him, regardless of what the United Nations does." Certain people are also apparently putting pressure on the United Nations to agree to a specific American-inspired resolution, without which they will not allow the inspectors to go back in. Clearly, there is a general view that the inspectors must be given the chance to prove that Saddam Hussein is now responding to the pressure that has been put on him.

In one of his answers, the Prime Minister really put his finger on a genuine and sincere concern of mine. He said that it was an article of faith for him that there should be the closest possible relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States. I have many friends in America—I have visited the United States many times—and I completely accept that, on many occasions, American intervention has been essential for freedom and liberty. We are grateful to the Americans for that, for the resources and, indeed, for the American lives that have been laid down to secure that.

I do not believe, however, that we can accept a situation in which America is able to write its own version of international law. Nor do I believe that the United Kingdom's national interest is built solely on an article of faith about British-American relations. We also happen to have serious relationships with Europe and with the Commonwealth. My concern is that, if we found ourselves the lone supporter of the United States in pursuing international action without the sanction of the international community, not only would we have failed to stand up for the rule of international law—the point that Al Gore was making—but we would have deeply

[Malcolm Bruce]

damaged Britain's national interests vis-a-vis the rest of the world. That is a matter to which we must give serious consideration.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Malcolm Bruce: I do not have time.

I am a member of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly—I shall be visiting it during the rest of this week—of which there are 44 member countries. I am frequently asked by MPs from other countries exactly what the British gain from their unequivocal and totally supportive relationship with the United States. I am also sometimes asked why our Prime Minister does not use the influence that he clearly has to persuade America that, if it wants to give moral leadership and authority to the world, it should engage with the world as a partner in international enterprises. For example, it is specifically suggested that America should support the International Criminal Court and engage in the ratification of Kyoto, and that it should not send its civil servants to world summits to block agreements on how to defeat poverty.

The point that we wish to get across to our American friends is that they risk squandering the very real reservoir of good will that exists if they treat international organisations on a pick-and-mix basis—using them if they support their interests but reviling them if they do not—and if they alone decide to write the rules in a different way from any other participant. The Prime Minister has a unique opportunity to ensure that America recognises its responsibility in that regard.

The Prime Minister also has a duty to British interests to ensure that the United Kingdom is clearly standing up for the right kind of relationship with the United States. It should not be a relationship in which there is not a cigarette paper between our Prime Minister and the President, but one in which support is based on a coherent public debate about international interests, and on the coherent application of international agreements. In that way, the Prime Minister would earn a great deal of respect and gratitude, as well as showing strong support for the interests of the United Kingdom's long-term influence in the world. People see this country as having a contribution to make, but if we are indistinguishable from America—if we are just its proxy, its surrogate—the very leadership that we can give is undermined and qualified.

We shall not have a substantive vote at the end of this debate. We shall, however, have established a recognition—I detect it right across the House—that there is very little support for the British Government to engage in American-led unilateral action that does not have the clear, unequivocal legal backing of the Security Council of the United Nations. If the Government have not got that message, they really have not been listening.

3.56 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Probably no hon. Member's life has been more affected by Iraq than mine. In 1995, I was sacked by my right hon. Friend, now the Prime Minister, for going to northern Iraq, which changed my life in the House somewhat. I have also been involved with the Iraqi opposition since 1979. Iraqi students were present at Cardiff university at that time, and they used to tell me about the atrocities that were going on in their country. I did not believe them—their allegations sounded so outrageous—but I found out subsequently that what they said was true, and that the situation was even worse than they had described.

Since 1984, I have chaired CARDRI—the campaign against repression and for democratic rights in Iraq—an organisation that has published several books on Iraq and puts out regular newsletters. During the last five years, I have chaired Indict, a campaign that started here in the House of Commons, backed by John Major—the then Prime Minister—Margaret Thatcher, Bill Clinton, President Mitterrand, as well as the present Prime Minister, and the great and the good from all over the world.

The aim of Indict was to collect evidence on Iraqi war crimes. There is no ad hoc tribunal on Iraq, as there is on Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. There ought to be, and even now I believe that the United Nations Security Council should agree to set one up. The atrocities committed by the Iraqi regime are horrific. There is not time to give details today but many are described in the Government's report and others in that produced by the American Administration.

Indict ran for two years without any funding. Everybody said that they supported us, but no one gave us any money until the US Congress gave us some. It did so because it is possible, in Europe, for individual countries to bring indictments against leading members of the Iraqi regime. Some people have scoffed at that and think that it sounds impossible. Even the Foreign Secretary told me today, in reply to my intervention, that we could not indict Saddam Hussein because it was not possible to get hold of him.

That response is incredible, given that, two years ago, on behalf of Indict, I took to the Attorney-General detailed evidence against Saddam Hussein and Tariq Aziz relating to the taking of hostages in Kuwait. They included more than 1,000 British hostages, some of whom were killed and some raped. Many still suffer from the trauma of their ordeal. They were British hostages, yet we are saying that we cannot indict Saddam Hussein because it is physically impossible to get hold of him. Let me remind colleagues that Milosevic was indicted while he was still head of state and, a year later, that helped to bring about the fall of his regime. He is now standing trial in The Hague. Nobody can tell me that it is impossible to indict one of the Iraqi war criminals because that simply is not true.

We have now taken evidence to five other countries. Last week, I was in Norway, where I met the Norwegian Attorney-General's staff. We took them evidence about Iraqi victims who now live in Norway, who were tortured by Uday Hussein, Saddam's eldest son. That information has now been passed to the Norwegian Attorney-General. The response of the his office, his staff and other members of the Government was totally different from that which we have had in the United Kingdom. I have to ask why we are not prepared, on the evidence that has been presented, to indict Iraqi war criminals.

Perhaps one answer comes from the former American ambassador for war crimes under the Clinton

Administration, with whom I have had a lot of dealings over the years. Just a few weeks ago, he wrote in the *New York Times:*

"Yet no Iraqi official (at least 10 are of extreme interest) has ever been indicted for some of the worst crimes of the 20th century. My efforts to obtain UN Security Council approval for an ad hoc international criminal tribunal encountered one obstacle after another in foreign capitals, in New York and even within the Clinton administration. The usual excuse was that a tribunal would jeopardise either the United Nations' inspections regime or its sanctions regime. We needed Hussein's co-operation, which a criminal indictment might discourage."

The ambassador went on to say:

"We know from the ad hoc criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and now for Sierra Leone, that indictments of alleged war criminals who lead tyrannical and genocidal regimes can destroy their political careers, isolate them internationally, end their regimes and even achieve justice. Whether or not the Security Council authorizes use of force against Iraq if credible inspections collapse, the world should build an anti-Hussein coalition through old-fashioned law enforcement."

My message to the House is that that is another option. It is an option that can be considered alongside the other options. And this option is backed by international law.

I find it incredible in this country, which I thought would lead the world on this issue, how often we have heard from our leaders on the Front Bench that war criminals can no longer hide in safety anywhere in the world. Lawyers say that if other countries took the same approach as the UK, no effective prosecution would ever be mounted and the hundreds of thousands of international victims would be left without redress.

Indict's lawyer, one of the top human rights lawyers in Britain, says that, short of a confession signed in blood, it is hard to think of what else is required by the Attorney-General.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Sack him.

Ann Clwyd: That was not a helpful contribution at this point.

Indict is concerned about the continued suffering of hostages, whose lives have been ruined by those crimes. We have interviewed hundreds of victims. I shall not begin to describe to the House the circumstances that they endured. They deserve redress, apart from any other consideration. If the best efforts of the UK Government and Indict cannot secure a prosecution, the fact should be openly acknowledged and debated, because I believe that that debate might also provide an impetus for an international tribunal.

I cannot believe that, once it knows the facts, this House will not add its support to the call that I am making. Hostage-taking is a grave breach of the Geneva convention. All signatory states, including the United Kingdom, have not only a right but an obligation under international law to prosecute or extradite offenders. If Tariq Aziz were to visit a country that had signed the Geneva convention, that country would have an obligation to arrest or extradite him if a UK arrest warrant were sent to it.

Given that there is a war on terror, why would not the UK wish to arrest a war criminal, or at least send a message to the world that war criminals and those who perpetrate acts of terror should no longer be allowed free movement internationally?

4.5 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The House will be amazed at some of the issues taken up by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd). I am sure that we are all concerned about them and will play our necessary part in putting pressure on the people who can act in these matters.

Today we have a very serious issue before us—whether the threat from Iraq is of such a nature as to warrant the intervention of British armed forces. However, the debate takes on a greater significance: we must determine whether, as a free and democratic nation, we are prepared to face up to the threat of international terror and violence emanating from Saddam Hussein.

William Tyndale, a great martyred reformer of Reformation days, who gave our nation the priceless gift of the Holy Scripture in our mother tongue, stated a basic principle:

"No king, no lord, no master or whatever ruler he be hath an absolute power in the world. His power is limited."

His power has to be limited.

We have to say today how far we shall allow terrorism and Saddam Hussein to go. It is all right to put up reasons and to worry about the future, but what will the future be if he gets his way and can release on the world what he no doubt has in his mind?

I was amazed by the statement of the Prime Minister, who said that we should read not just about the 1 million dead in the war against Iran. Our country was not without blame in that war. There was substantial backing from the United States and our own country in that war, so we are responsible for a degree of the blood-shedding.

Today, we come up against the great problem of credibility. If this House, our Government and the Governments of other countries are not consistent in the war against terrorism and choose whom they want to prosecute and with whom they want to enter into agreements, the other countries of the world will say, when we take a stand against Iraq, "What business is it of yours? You are not even consistent. When certain decisions suit your policies you enter into judgment, but when they do not suit your policies you do not enter into judgment."

Iraq must not be allowed to continue to conceal weapons of mass destruction. It must not be allowed to continue to stockpile such weapons and prepare for their use. When, four years ago, the Iraqi weapons arsenal was investigated to a degree, the inspectors had to withdraw. Would any of us like to put a figure on the immense gathering of arms that has now gone into that arsenal? How much power has Saddam in his hands today, as we meet here?

In those circumstances, I welcome the fact that the British Government are facing up to their international responsibilities. It saddens me, however, to have to say that the Prime Minister appears ready to challenge terrorism in the middle east—and rightly so—but refuses to challenge the activities of terrorists who are operating in a part of this United Kingdom. It is hypocrisy to join President Bush in upholding the causes of freedom and democracy, while continuing to support the retention of IRA-Sinn Fein in the Government of Northern Ireland.

I have raised the matter personally with the President of the United States. He was dumb when I said to him, "What if I suggested that you invite the bombers of

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

Oklahoma to the White House and give them tea and buns and jam, because they were not really bad men?" But I, a democratically elected person, am being told that I must sit down and enter into government with the very person mentioned today by my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth)—a man who brought one of the aliens put out of our country home to Londonderry and told his mother "Nothing will happen to the boy." When the boy came home he was sent for by the allies of that same gentleman, and murdered.

We must be consistent. The world is looking for consistency, and the Prime Minister can only strengthen his hand by being consistent.

The House should know that IRA-Sinn Fein Members who refuse to take their seats, although they have offices here, are keen supporters of Iraq. Repeatedly, day after day, facts are leaked concerning the alignment of IRA-Sinn Fein with world terrorist organisations in, for instance, Colombia. Yet we say that these people are fit to be members of the Government of part of the United Kingdom.

I welcome every step that has been taken. I welcome what the Prime Minister has done. I welcome the fact that tonight we have at least an opportunity to put our feelings on record. I believe that the Prime Minister needs to be encouraged; but I say to him and to President Bush, "Until you be of one mind and, without expediency, consistent in your opposition to terrorism throughout the world, the world will not turn and listen to you when you want to put up a coalition to fight terrorism."

All terrorism does the same thing. I have attended too many funerals in my own country, of both Protestants and Roman Catholics, not to know what terrorism has done. I also know the dread of people who cannot leave their homes in the morning certain that they will return in the evening, because of terrorist strikes. All terrorism is wicked, and it has to be dealt with. When a man like Saddam gets arms together, we can only have a terrible nightmare about what could happen if he unleashed those weapons on innocent people. We have a duty to take a stand in the House today, and I trust that we will take that stand.

4.14 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I can at least thank the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) for allowing us to return to the essence of the debate. We have travelled a long way from this morning's statement by the Prime Minister, and the opening speeches of the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). We are talking about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction—about Saddam Hussein's biological and chemical weapons, and the possibility of nuclear weapons. The Prime Minister made it clear that those weapons could pose a threat not just to the region but to our own interests.

Many years ago, in the 1930s, Winston Churchill complained—on a very cold and quiet night in the House—that the Government were putting the cart before the horse. He made gestures depicting the cart and the horse, and he was so eloquent that those present could see them proceeding through the Chamber. We have done a lot of putting the cart before the horse today. We are talking about the prospect of a new United Nations resolution, not about a declaration of war. A declaration of war is not imminent. It is not the policy of either Her Majesty's Government or the Government of the United States of America. There is no point in our discussing numerous possible scenarios that do not yet exist.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said, very pertinently, that there had been a policy change in the United States. There has been such a change. Until 1941, the policy of the United States was one of isolation; between 1945 and the fall of the Berlin wall, it was a policy of containment and deterrence. There was no clear policy between the fall of the wall and the events of 11 September. Those are what Condoleezza Rice calls the bookends of American foreign policy. Now the United States has a new foreign policy, enunciated by its President and supported by its Congress: the policy of the pre-emptive strike, based simply on the fact—the lethal fact—that 3,000 individuals died on 11 September. Incidentally, they came from 50 nations, not just America, and 100 British people died. That brought about a policy change in the United States, and the focus of the change is Iraq.

I agree with the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). No one here will say that Saddam Hussein is other than an evil man. No one will say that he does not possess biological and chemical weapons, or that he is not on the way to acquiring weapons of mass destruction. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) said that this was not a debate about human rights, but I think that it is: it is about the human rights of those who live in Iraq.

To my right hon. and hon. Friends who seem somehow to think that President Bush might be more evil than Saddam Hussein, I say that international socialism does not stop at the borders of Iraq. We have an interest in the people of Iraq. We have an interest in the 60 per cent. of the Iraqi population who are Shi'ite Muslims. They have suffered terrible oppression during the years of Saddam Hussein, and they are still being oppressed, in the south and in the north. How many Members have mentioned the no-fly zone today? How many have mentioned that British airmen fly over those zones every day to protect Marsh Arabs in the south or Iraqi Kurds in the north?

Why should the population of Iraq suffer under sanctions when, as the Prime Minister said, $3 billion worth of oil a year is being exported on the black market and is illegally going into the pocket of Saddam Hussein, who does nothing to relieve the poverty of his own people? Why should those people have to suffer for ever under a regime of sanctions?

In the speeches of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I detected no confidence whatsoever in the United Nations. The Foreign Secretary spoke of the failure of the League of Nations to act at the time of Abyssinia. We saw the consequences of that, in the form of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. As the Foreign Secretary said, the United Nations was built on the ashes of the second world war, and to prevent a failure similar to that of the League of Nations, a Security Council was created. According to my reckoning, it has passed 16 resolutions on Iraq since resolution 1901, nine of which—according to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram)—have not been respected.

The first resolution, the ceasefire resolution, called for not just the sending in of weapons inspectors but the repatriation of Kuwaiti and Arab prisoners of war. That has not happened to this day. It also called for the return of confiscated Kuwaiti property, which has not happened either. There has been no respect for any UN resolution up to now.

We have had six crises concerning Iraq in recent years. The Foreign Secretary said that a new UN resolution would be tabled in the next few days. That resolution should be clear and precise and should come under chapter 7, making it mandatory on the Iraqi regime. All the earlier resolutions, including those on the confiscation of Kuwaiti assets, on the return of Kuwaiti prisoners of war and on giving the inspectors totally unrestricted access, should be rolled into the new resolution, which should have a strict term of compliance with a fixed deadline.

Why should such a resolution not be accepted by the Security Council, which exists under a mandate from the United Nations, which itself exists to promote international peace and security? Why should we be pessimistic and assume that the UN will not do its duty? Some Labour Back Benchers think that the focus of the debate will go to the Labour party conference next week, but it will not: it will go to the Security Council. If the Security Council wants to uphold international order, peace and security, it will roll the resolutions of the past 11 years into one and force Iraq to comply.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary said that we, as a nation state, will not act outside international law, so let us have more confidence in the UN than has been demonstrated today and let us not put the cart before the horse, talking about military action and what will happen after it. Let us stick with the UN and see what the resolution is and how Saddam Hussein responds. Whatever action takes place will follow a UN resolution, not a resolution of the House.

If I were a pilot patrolling the no-fly zone or a soldier going into action on behalf of the British Government, I wonder how I would feel about sitting around waiting to see which Members voted in which way. Many young men from Middlesbrough join up. They go into the armed forces voluntarily. Their parents have an interest in them, and so do we. Why should they sit around waiting for a vote in the House? It is for the Government, acting with the United States of America on the back of Security Council resolutions, to tell the House what action is to be taken if the resolutions are not complied with.

Let us not get carried away with matters of organisation, administration or procedure. These are major issues. As the right hon. Member for Devizes said, the House can rise to the occasion when it has to. The time may come for that, but for now we should send the focus to the United Nations and see what the Security Council has to say next week.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The last two contributors to this debate have had to contend with a continual low chatter throughout the Chamber, which is extremely insulting to them. I look to you for a ruling on the matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): The Chamber is rather full this afternoon, to say the least, but I think that what the hon. Gentleman says will be noted and hon. Members will listen to the speeches.

4.23 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): This has been an interesting debate so far. I hope that I am not overstating the case in saying that there has been a clear difference of view, as exemplified in the speeches of the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway).

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) mentioned Churchill. In another famous debate on whether to go to war, in 1940 on the Norwegian campaign, somebody—Lloyd George, I think—said that Churchill should not allow himself to become an air raid shelter for the shortcomings of the Treasury Bench. I hope that the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley will not become an air raid shelter. It is up to the Prime Minister now. Whatever the sensitivities in his own party, he must speak directly to the British people and make a justification for war. He started to do that today, and we need more of that and a more serious debate on the issue.

We need a real debate on whether we are talking about acting alone or under the auspices of the UN, and whether we are talking about regime change or the removal or weapons of mass destruction. We have started to make progress. Our constituents are worried and look to the House for answers to these questions.

I want to make a stab, in my own inadequate way, at answering some of the questions. I do not believe that it is the job of the UN—or, even more problematically, of the US backed by the UK—to change a regime in the middle east. Leaving aside questions of international law, what are the practicalities? There are nearly 30 Arab nations, and not one is a democracy. Trying to impose our ideas of democracy on Iraq may unleash democratic Kurdish and Shia movements that could lead to the dissolution of the country. It would be wrong to believe that, from the Arab point of view, our system is necessarily superior to theirs.

This may not be the view of everybody in my party, but personally I reject the idea of regime change. If Saddam is in breach of UN resolutions, in my view it is right for the UN to use force, and I accept that without its use he is unlikely to make any movement at all. He would be extremely stupid to refuse to co-operate, but he has already proved himself a master of prevarication and brinkmanship, so we can look forward to weeks and months of frustration.

We have not really heard from the Treasury Bench whether this nation and this Parliament are prepared to act alone, with the US, to force the issue. US policy makers may be worried that the components of a nuclear weapons capability are so easy to disperse and hide that it would be necessary for the US to take over the country for a time. That may be their real aim, even if they have little confidence in restoring democracy in the long term.

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

An attack, or the threat of an attack, may be justified on the basis of the breaking of UN resolutions, but I suspect that that will not be the real trigger—many countries are in breach of UN resolutions. Let us be serious. There are three sides of a triangle to justify a war: capability, means and intent. Does Saddam have the capability to manufacture weapons of mass destruction? We have the dossier, and I am prepared to accept that he does, but I would like to hear more about the weapons of mass destruction held by other countries in the region—Iran, Syria and Israel—and by other rogue states, notably North Korea.

Does Saddam have the means to deliver those weapons of mass destruction to the west? Nobody seriously suggests that he can do so militarily: he does not have the long-range missiles, and he would be met by an overwhelming, annihilatory response. We know from John Major that Saddam was given an explicit private warning before the Gulf war that any use of chemical or biological weapons would meet with immediate devastating retaliation. We know that Sir Michael Quinlan, the former permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence, takes the view that deterrence has worked, and will work in the future.

The suggestion, then, is that Saddam will deliver the weapons not by conventional military means but by clandestine means. Where is the evidence of his links to al-Qaeda? What would he gain by such links? Are there terrorists already capable of inflicting devastating damage on our economy? Would not our acting alone make us a more likely target for Muslim fundamentalists? Are we not uniquely vulnerable to terrorist attacks, as an open society with no identification cards, and with the London underground, Heathrow and the channel tunnel? Means of delivery—the second side of the triangle—is problematical, not proven.

The most difficult of the three factors is intent. What would Saddam gain by attacking the west, apart from his own immediate destruction? Has he not outlived all his foreign and domestic opponents by being at least rational and not suicidal? I do not think that anyone seriously suggests that he intends to attack the west. Would he attack Israel, which already has a nuclear deterrent?

A correspondent posed two questions to me: is it Saddam's intention to obtain atomic weapons and, were he to do so, would he use them, either physically or as a means to blackmail other countries? My correspondent says that if the answer to those two questions is yes, an attack is justified. I suspect that that is behind US thinking. We are frightened that possession of such weapons would give Saddam an ability to blackmail other countries in the region. That is a justifiable point of view. However, I suggest that other countries in the region which Saddam might wish to blackmail are under, or could be under, the American nuclear and military umbrella.

Is the proposed attack really about a new concept of global thinking? That is the issue. Is the Truman doctrine—the concept of deterrence that has preserved peace and stability for more than 50 years—to be replaced by a new Bush doctrine of using a pre-emptive strike to overthrow dangerous regimes that could pose a threat? Truman coined his readiness to use force to protect existing democratic regimes from communist takeover. He was obviously thinking in the context of 1947 and the defence of western Europe. We pay tribute to the foundation of NATO.

I believe that the Bush doctrine, if there is one, is very much more dangerous. I am strongly pro-American, and to equate their love of liberty with the regimes they oppose is ridiculous. However, the United States is a superpower, and with ultimate power comes great risks. With hundreds of billions of dollars of defence expenditure, it can crush any enemy in the world. I do not believe that absolute power will corrupt the US, but there are risks. Like all other superpowers in history, it will come to realise the limits of force. We already know that overwhelming military power cannot, for instance, defeat suicide bombers.

Yesterday I received a letter from some Iraqi exiles. They oppose war with Iraq because they believe that it will bolster Saddam's claim that he is a champion of the Palestinian cause. We can destroy Saddam, but can we destroy his adopted cause of Palestinian autonomy? The best way in which to deal with Muslim terrorism is for America—and only America can do this—to put pressure on Israel to abide by UN resolutions and withdraw completely from the west bank.

Where will the Bush doctrine take us? Where will it stop? What are the tests? A military junta is allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon in Pakistan but not in Iraq and, presumably, not in North Korea or Iran. Pakistan was only righting the balance with India, and Saddam would claim that he was righting the balance with Israel.

I do not believe that the case for attacking Iraq unilaterally, without the UN, has yet been made. That is not to say that it is wrong to threaten force—that is the only language that Saddam understands. No doubt there will be weeks of frustration. No doubt when the UN teams go in there will be more frustration and delays. However, the fact remains that after 1998, the UN contained Saddam and kept him on some sort of leash.

Finally, I remain of the belief that it is safe to contain rather than to threaten destruction of Saddam's regime. If he is threatened with destruction, he could act irrationally, with incalculable consequences for the world community. Let us march in step with fellow permanent members of the UN Security Council and insist on weapons inspections, backed by the use of international force if they are not complied with. That is the right path to take.

4.33 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): The House of Commons is at its best on occasions such as this, and so it should be, because there is nothing more important than war and peace. There is no more important debate than that about whether the Government will send our forces to war. We know what war means—the killing of civilians and our service men and women.

There is agreement across the House about a satisfactory outcome to the problem. It would be the reintroduction of the United Nations inspectors on a basis that enabled them to do their work properly. It would be the identification of the locations of all weapons of mass destruction, the facilities for manufacturing them and their destruction. The achievement of that outcome without the use of military force is surely what everyone in the House of Commons wants.

I believe that the document published by the Government today is an intelligence assessment which we should accept. I accept the document's basis that since the UN inspectors left Iraq, the regime has produced chemical and biological weapons, tried to further its attempts to develop a nuclear weapon, and extended the range of its ballistic missile programme. In so doing, the Iraqi regime is flouting the authority of the United Nations. That is an important point. We are not talking about India or Pakistan. The Iraqi regime is supposed to be complying with the successive UN Security Council resolutions to which many right hon. and hon. Members have referred.

What is to be done? In the final analysis, can force be justified in these circumstances with United Nations authority? There is an overwhelming consensus on this side of the House that any use of force to achieve the objectives must be authorised by the United Nations Security Council. However, I think that no one in their right mind would want force to be used.

The importance of the United Nations cannot be underestimated. I welcome the fact that a considerable number of speakers, including my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), have referred to the importance of the United Nations. When the institution was born in 1945 in San Francisco, in the aftermath of the second world war, there were hopes that it would enable us to develop a world in which we did not go to war on the scale that we had in the past, and that we would rise to the challenge posed by man's ability to produce weapons of mass destruction which, if ever they were used, would make the planet uninhabitable for the majority of the human population.

Giving the Security Council the power to enforce resolutions was deliberate. That was the basic structure of the UN. Once the resolutions were passed and the decisions taken democratically by the community of states throughout the world, the Security Council would be the marshal and have the responsibility of ensuring that there was no proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In those days, the focus was on nuclear weapons, following Nagasaki and Hiroshima, but today, rightly, there is an increasing focus on and concern about chemical and biological weapons—all weapons of mass destruction.

Reference has been made to the important change in the US military doctrine, which was confirmed last week. I see many people today in the House who took part in debates during the cold war. Indeed, the bulk of my political life took place during the cold war. We did not agree on a lot of matters but, funnily enough, we are beginning to agree more now. Cold war policy was based on mutually assured destruction—a willingness actually to use nuclear weapons. It was a dangerous situation and the world was a dangerous place.

The national security strategy document published last week by the United States is very important. In it we can see the effects of two great changes in the military and security landscape that have taken place in the past two decades. There was genuine concern that the cold war would become a real, hot war between NATO and the USSR, with both sides armed to the teeth with nuclear warheads. The cold war came to an end and it is true to say that the world was a safer place for it. However, it is far harder to say that the world remains a safer place now. Since the atrocities of 11 September last year, the focus of the US has shifted to rogue states and international terrorism.

The US strategy paper states:

> "None of these contemporary threats rival the sheer destructive power that was arrayed against us by the Soviet Union. However, the nature and motivations of these new adversaries, their determination to obtain destructive powers hitherto available only to the world's strongest states, and the greater likelihood that they will use weapons of mass destruction against us, make today's security environment more complex and dangerous."

The development of the policy of pre-emption, as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough rightly called it, is important. I am sure that the House will want to return to it in the weeks ahead.

When the House debated the annual report of the Intelligence and Security Committee last July—a Committee of which I am pleased to be a member—I set out my concerns about the threat of international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. International terrorism is many years old and nations have been developing weapon of mass destruction for decades, but together they pose a terrifying combination. The risk of hostile nations giving international terrorists access to weapons of mass destruction is a real issue that needs to be addressed. It is no secret that international measures to contain the development of weapons of mass destruction leave a lot to be desired. We must make greater progress towards blocking such access.

We should all be concerned at the build-up towards a new military operation in Iraq and the United States' apparent disregard for the international community and the United Nations—that has been referred to by Labour members. There is widespread concern in the country, which has been provoked by some of the statements from Rumsfeld and Cheney. The United States is the only superpower and we want to see it support the United Nations; and if it takes action, we want that action to be authorised by the United Nations. A particular cause for alarm is the impact that a unilateral attack would have on the stability of the middle east and on the coalition against international terrorism that has been pieced together since 11 September last year.

The situation is fast changing and there is scope for a UN mandate to tackle it, avoiding fresh military action. Weapons inspections to enforce Iraqi compliance with UN Security Council resolutions must be effective, and the inspectors must be allowed to do their work without limits.

It remains my sincere hope that this situation will be resolved without the use of fresh military action against Iraq. The enforcement of UN resolutions must be strict and effective. I am sure that I join many of my colleagues in urging the Government to do what they can to pursue a resolution to this crisis within the international community and without recourse to war.

4.42 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Although I did not agree with everything that he said, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) made some important points, one of which was that, if we are ultimately forced to go to war, it is extremely important that the population of this country feel that what we are embarking on is the

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

right thing to do, and that they have a clear understanding of the situation and what the consequences are likely to be. Despite some extremely informative Back-Bench contributions today and after listening to the Front-Bench spokesmen, I still feel that there will be some confusion, particularly when I think of the letters that I have received from some of my constituents. I hope that today is a beginning and that the Prime Minister will take further opportunities to spell out the Government's view and to put information in the public domain through this House.

It has been a confusing six or seven months. In December last year, when the Anglo-French summit took place in London, it was reported that the Prime Minister had given the strongest signal yet of his opposition to any prospect of widening the military campaign against terrorism to include Iraq. It was reported that he stood shoulder to shoulder with Mr. Chirac outside No. 10, both of them taking that view. Therefore the public are right to ask, as I have, what has led to this escalation over the past few months, to the point where American politicians are talking about pre-emptive action. It is important to get the chronology of events right and to get all the evidence into the public domain.

I have no doubt—I had no doubt even before seeing the dossier this morning—that Saddam Hussein is a dangerous and evil man. That has been shown by his attitude to the weapons inspectors and his cavalier attitude to the UN resolutions. I believe that, unlike the old guard in the Kremlin during the cold war, he would be willing to use weapons of mass destruction. During the cold war I always argued, sometimes with Labour Members, that I believed that the weapons of mass destruction held by the Soviet Union were in the hands of people who were extremely cautious and understood the consequences of their use. I do not think that Saddam Hussein is like that, and I suspect that he is not unique. If we as a nation really believe that he will use such weapons and that he is in the process of acquiring nuclear capability, we have to deal with it. The question is how we do that. How can we take it to the nth degree to try to ensure that we can remove these weapons without having to commit our troops to war?

I agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench and with the Prime Minister that we must deal with this through the United Nations. There must be succinct resolutions that are unambiguous in content and in the timetable set out. Clearly, time is not on our side. Another year, 18 months or two years might go by if Saddam Hussein is allowed to prevaricate, as he has in the past. I am totally behind the plan that has been set out today to try to use all possible legitimate means to ensure that we remove the weapons from him. If one of the consequences of that removal is a change of regime, which seems likely under such circumstances, so be it. I believe that that is all to the better. Removing those weapons and ensuring that there is no possibility of their being transferred to third parties—another important issue—must be our priority.

Over the past few weeks we have heard from American politicians—our friends and allies who are seeking our support—statements that give cause for concern. Like other hon. Members who approach this from different positions, I can quote Mr. Cheney, who said that even if inspectors went in, it would provide no assurance at all, and other such comments. It is therefore imperative that the Prime Minister use every ounce of his influence with the American Government to ensure that they fully understand that, although we are their friends, it is not a love that asks no questions. Sometimes friends are the only ones who can say what the problem is and how they should behave. If they will not take it from their friends, they will take it from no one else. It is critical that, over the next few weeks, the Government use that friendship and influence to ensure that the American Government fully understand that we are here to support them, but that actions must be taken in a structured way to try to achieve the best outcome.

The big question is: if the UN's activities do not work and there is no clear UN mandate to take action, what should be done then? That is something that we as Members of Parliament will have to ask ourselves. Each of us will have to ask that question if there is a vote. I truly believe that this crosses party lines. We answer to our consciences on this matter as well as to the people outside and to those whom we might deploy in the battlefield. In considering what the consequences will be if the UN resolutions are not successful, it is important that we ask ourselves whether we believe that military action is in the British interest, whether the British interest is threatened by weapons of mass destruction, and whether, even without a UN mandate, it is incumbent upon us to accept and support military action. The answers will depend upon how, in the next few weeks, the Government develop their argument and upon the information that they have started to put in front of us today in order to persuade Members of Parliament, and more particularly the wider public, of the facts that they have to prove that this situation is a threat to us.

We must be quite clear. We may believe that the situation is not a threat to the British interest, but is a threat to the wider international community so we must be quite up front and say that, although it may not be British subjects who will be attacked, we believe that it is our duty—and it is our wish—to support the wider international community and on that basis we will join forces with the Americans and any other allies who want to take a stand on this. Alternatively, if we believe that Britain is under threat, we must identify what that threat is.

On 8 September *The Sunday Telegraph* reported that the Prime Minister

"warned last night that Saddam Hussein was a 'very real threat to Britain'".

If that is true and if it is the Prime Minister's belief and that of the people out there that it is imperative that we support a war in order to protect Britain, we shall need a little more information than what is before us today.

I am old enough to remember the cold war, when Governments of all persuasions believed that we could be subject to a nuclear attack. There were regular briefings and information on civil defence—I remember having them at school. There are certainly important questions to be asked about what provision is being made in terms of vaccines if we are at risk from chemical attacks—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's time is up.

4.53 pm

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): It is not often in a debate of this nature that I begin by congratulating an Opposition Member, but today I commend the speech by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) for drawing attention to the really big issues that the House will have to address sooner rather than later. If the world is being asked to move away from a doctrine of containment and deterrence and towards a different doctrine of pre-emptive strikes, regime change, attacks and displacements of potential enemies or unsympathetic regimes, the implications for the planet are enormous.

We have to begin the process by at least engaging with the notion presented to us today that we face a choice between greater or lesser threats from Saddam Hussein, who would seek to exploit a dishonest peace, or from George Bush, who would wish to pursue a disreputable war. My belief is that we may not be in a position to stop the United States waging such a war. If there is a war, it will have very little to do with the pursuit of human rights and everything to do with the redistribution of oil rights. We have to recognise that the international threat that we face relates to the potential collapse of the existing global order of rules-based systems.

We also have to recognise the relevance of the dossier that has been presented to the House this morning, albeit at very short notice. On the positive side, the best one can say is that the dossier can at least allow us to move on from the pursuit of press rumours and to present a document for the weapons inspectors to address, scrutinise and evaluate. However, in reality there is no smoking gun to be found in this dossier. At best it is a deeply flawed, partial and superficial document. It is heavy on supposition and light on fact. It is closer to propaganda than it is to scrutiny. If it had been produced by those on the Opposition Front Bench, I suspect that the only difference would have been that it would have appeared under the title "Saddam's Evil Eyes".

As my hon. Friends take away the document and subject it to scrutiny, they should look at some of the contradictions and flaws that scream out from its pages. A great deal is mentioned about the conduct of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, and the wretched use of chemical weapons in that war and against the Kurds, but there is not a single reference to our own involvement in that process, or that of the United States. There is no mention of the fact that the United States continued to supply crop-spraying helicopters to the Iraqi regime during that period and provided technical assistance and advisers to assist with the targeting of bombings. There is reference to the fact that the UN made a presidential statement criticising Iraq, but it had to do so in default of the fact that Britain refused to support any of the resolutions that were before the UN at that time, seeking to criticise Iraq, and that America vetoed those resolutions. We ought to put ourselves accurately in the frame.

The dossier treats us to a long list of the weapons of mass destruction that we are told Saddam Hussein is in the process of acquiring. We are also told that he has been on a shopping tour in Africa. That is very interesting but it needs to be set against the fact that Hans Blix, the chief weapons inspector, has said within the past two weeks that he has received no evidence of Iraq acquiring new weapons of mass destruction. Had he received any such evidence, he would have brought it to the attention of the Security Council. So we have to move from allegations to evidence and put that evidence in the hands of the inspectors.

Great play is made of Saddam Hussein's search for weapons of mass destruction in the form of long-range missiles, but no reference made to the part of the UNSCOM inspectorate report stating that by the end of 1997, 817 out of 819 long-range weapons held by Iraq had been destroyed.

There is also talk of the inspections regime having been disrupted and a great deal on page 34 about non-co-operation and sensitive sites, but there is no mention of the specific agreements negotiated by Richard Butler and then by Kofi Annan for more extensive inspection regimes which allowed full inspection of those sites. We have to be very careful not to write those out of history as it would be very easy for the United States to demand a new inspections regime that no longer had to adhere to the memoranda of understanding negotiated by the UN.

We are also told that a compelling case for preparing for war is to be found in Iraq's intentions. This part of the dossier takes a Mystic Meg approach to international planning. There is no basis on which weapons inspectors—or even the United Nations until the beginning of this year—could say that Iraq presents a clear and present danger, or a threat internationally or to the middle east. Instead we are presented with the clear knowledge that there has been no threat from Iraq to the United States, the UK, Europe or anyone else during the past 10 years, throughout which we have systematically bombed Iraq on a daily or weekly basis during this strange, bizarre peace.

We have to ask ourselves what has changed in a year. Last year we said that this imperfect peace was not a problem, but we are now saying that it is a very real problem. Logically, we have to address the point raised by the hon. Member for Gainsborough by asking what on earth would prompt Saddam—who may be a tyrant, but who is a calculating, surviving tyrant—to change his mind and say that he now feels obliged to acquire weapons of mass destruction and threaten to use them knowing that he would be destroyed as a consequence. Iraq's crime has not been to threaten anyone, but to renegotiate oil contracts; not with American companies, but with Russia and France. That is why the American Administration are demanding not just the return of the weapons inspectors, but regime change. That will mean the reallocation of oil contracts to those who support American bombing.

The Bush agenda of a pre-emptive strike would lead us into a new era of adventurism. It would be the imposition of a new set of international values; not the values of the west, but the values of the wild west. It would justify all the presumptions made by terrorist organisations about the right to take unilateral action against anyone with whom they disagree. Sadly, Bush will hit Iraq in much the same way that a drunk will hit a bottle. He needs to do that to satisfy his thirst for power and oil.

I must tell the Prime Minister that the role of a friend in such circumstances is not to pass the drunk the bottle; rather it is to divert the drunk from a path which would be as destructive to their own interests as it would be to everyone in their path. The Prime Minister must also understand that it would be perilous to take Parliament and the country down this path. Once the British public

[Alan Simpson]

understood exactly what the war was about they would not support it. The Prime Minister may be able to command the support of his Cabinet in such circumstances, but not that of his country. He may even be able to get the support of Parliament, but not that of the public.

It is the duty of this House to remind the Government that there is no moral mandate to follow this path. It cannot and will not be acceptable to suggest that Britain is willing to pay a blood price for an oil contract.

5.2 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): After five and a half hours of debate, there is still a great deal to be said. The speeches with which I identify most closely have been those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) and the remarkable speech of the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), which was brimming with common sense.

Some 12,000 of my constituents are working at the sharp end of this debate. Hundreds of them are world-class scientists, technologists and engineers, thousands of them are members of Her Majesty's forces who are prepared to die for their country and thousands more are civil servants and private sector support staff. All of them are just as much citizens of our country as you or I, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They and their families are part of our community. They go to work, come home, go to the pub, play sport and share our values and aspirations for our country and the world. I salute them and their families. Too often we either take them for granted or assume that the people who will do the Government's bidding are a separate group of people. They are a part of us.

Perhaps it is because for nearly 20 years I have represented so much of the British Army in and around Salisbury Plain that I found were few surprises in the dossier published today. Perhaps it is because I represent the people who work at the Centre For Applied Microbiology and Research at Porton Down who develop the vaccines. Perhaps it is because I have learned so much from the people who work at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down whose job it is to find detection systems and develop systems for protecting our military personnel, vehicles, ships and aircraft, or because I represent so many people who work at the Nuclear Biological and Chemical Centre at Winterbourne Gunner, who are responsible for training, not just British forces, but other forces to protect themselves against chemical, biological and nuclear attack.

Of course the Government should not give us raw intelligence—their most secret intelligence—but they must tell the British people enough to gain their trust. I believe that the Government have achieved that. It may be a cliché to say that the world changed on 9/11 last year, but many people have not got that message yet. We have to face the fact that when we are dealing with regimes like Saddam's or terrorist movements, the old cold war concept of deterrence simply will not work any more. Saddam Hussein does not see weapons of mass destruction as weapons of last resort; he sees them as tools of current policy to be used as he has already used them and, I am confident, will use them again. Consequently, we must recognise that the traditional interpretation of the United Nations charter may need to be rethought. We have to be realistic about the definition of "immediate threat" as a justification for pre-emptive action. The old thinking of the cold war simply will not do, and Saddam knows that.

For 10 years, the west has not been prepared to defend its values. The United States—it has no greater admirer than myself—was weak through the Clinton years in failing to respond to the earlier attacks on the World Trade Centre, failing to respond adequately to attacks on its embassies in Africa, and failing to respond to the attack on the USS Cole and to the expulsion of the UN weapons inspectors. The USA has now thrown down the gauntlet to the United Nations to test its authority. That is a crucial point. Our objective must be to find a new United Nations resolution which is focused on the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) for laying that out so clearly as the Opposition's policy.

Regime change may be a consequence of that and we should not recoil from that concept. The rules have changed and we must think this through maturely, not least because Saddam Hussein is making it harder to make progress in resolving the Israel-Palestine crisis. After all, he is also causing untold suffering to his own people, especially children. The impact on the neighbouring states, particularly our brave ally in NATO, Turkey, but also Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria, will be great.

We underestimate the reasons why the Arab and Islamic world has been so united in its opposition to military action against Saddam to date. It has been partly out of fear—win or lose, anyone who thwarts Saddam is in trouble. It is partly out of the recognition that he and al-Qaeda provide a focus for millions of disaffected people who either have nothing to lose in their miserable lives of poverty and hopelessness or who resent our affluence and the domination of the world by the nations of the west. This group includes a large number of people who live in the United Kingdom, so this is nothing like the Gulf war and we should realise that.

I hope and pray that we will not go to war, but if we do I believe that our cause is just. War would be a last resort, but we would win. The evil and damage that war necessarily entails would be proportionate to the evil and damage prevented. It would, then, be a just war in terms of the western, Christian, ethical tradition. I listen with respect to Christian leaders whose job it is to promote peace. They are right to do so for the greater the risks and the more devastating the impact of conflict on military personnel and civilians alike, the more cautious we should be. Such caution is a strength of western civilization. It underlines the weakness of terrorists and tyrants alike who have always exploited our preference for peace and our reluctance to do battle.

How long do we watch and wait until a judgment has to be made? I trust our Prime Minister in this matter. I agree with him that knowing what we know about Saddam I would not want it on my conscience that we let him carry on unhindered.

Many of us today will have received briefing documents from organisations, particularly charities, and none more important than the Save the Children

document. I read it carefully. The briefing note which points out what is happening in Iraq is the best argument yet for quick intervention against Saddam. It is outrageous that he is allowed to get away with such actions in his own country. That briefing note had the opposite effect on me to that which was intended.

Looking beyond this crisis, I think that it is extremely important that we, as a nation and as an ally of the strongest nation on earth, should ensure that a new world order includes a deliberate policy of ensuring that the rich and powerful nations of the world do very much more to assist, and sometimes to persuade, the poorer nations to reduce poverty and invest in health, food, education and water. I ask the Government, whether or not we go to war, what is their intention when it comes to reconstruction—to building the confidence not only of Iraq but of other countries in future? We must harness our science and technology in their interests as well as our own, because poverty breeds fear and instability. That suits Saddam fine, even in his own country, where he deliberately starves children of food and medicine.

In my view, physical and intellectual prosperity is the enemy of dictatorship. That is why, if we do not get the United Nations resolution, and if we do not get the inspectors back and the removal of the weapons of mass destruction, in my judgment regime change would indeed be justified—if necessary, by military means.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because hon. Members have today rightly focused their attention on the debate in the House, they may be unaware of the fact that earlier today there took place a devastating terrorist attack on worshippers at one of the largest Hindu temples in the world, the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir in Gandhinagar, in which I understand that 28 people have been shot. Would it be in order to advise Members of this, so that they might express their horror and sympathy?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): That is not, strictly speaking, a point of order for the Chair, but the House will have heard the points that the hon. Gentleman has made, and Members will make their own judgments and have their own thoughts about them.

5.11 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I suppose that it is far too early to try to reflect on who could have been responsible for this atrocity, but I think that the whole House will share in the shock and dismay at this news, and would want to express sympathy for all those who have been injured and their families.

I suppose that the news also tempers some of the comments that we might want to make in the debate. We have been trying to respond as a group of parliamentarians to a threat that we know exists—a threat that we have seen demonstrated. The continuing failure of the international community to respond to the various problems that exist in all parts of the world will put even more pressure on all of us who take part in the debate to measure the words that we use in this Chamber and to ensure that we do not ourselves inflame any of those organisations or individuals who feel at the moment that they are not being listened to.

The news also demands from us that we send a clear message to those who have used this method of raising their particular grievance—shooting innocent people at a place of worship is no way to resolve a grievance. People should be able to go to such a place to join with others to celebrate or commemorate, or just to exercise their free will as far as their religious beliefs are concerned. They should be able to trust that they can do so without fear that it will bring their life to an end. We need to send a clear message that, whether it is in India, Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the middle east, New York or anywhere else, democracy will respond by ensuring that those who use terrorisim to highlight their grievances will not win. If that message goes out from this Parliament today, although it will not reduce the pain of people who are suffering, it will at least assure them not only that our thoughts are with them but that we are determined to build a better world in which some of these problems might well be resolved.

Before the recall of Parliament, many people expressed an initial scepticism that any evidence existed of anything except the fact that some people believed that we had a United States President who had a hit list of two or three countries and was determined to finish some unfinished business that his father had not managed to secure some 10 or 11 years ago. I believe that all of us, whichever side of the debate we are on today or tomorrow, were anxious to ensure that our Parliament, our political processes, would not be directed into that scenario. We were looking forward to finding some way of coming together as a group of elected politicians in a democratic forum and having a meaningful discussion about any evidence that might exist.

The document that was produced today does not prove or disprove any side of the argument. It re-emphasises some things that we knew. It re-emphasises the fact that we knew that Saddam Hussein's regime was uniquely evil—we knew that it had used weapons of mass destruction against its own population. In that sense, the document did not provide any new and telling evidence, but it did assemble in one place enough evidence to suggest, I would hope, to most reasonable people that there was a need to deal with the issue now.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, I was discussing with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who was then a shadow foreign affairs spokesperson, what our reaction should be as an Opposition. I think that we took the right decision. Although we were concerned about other issues—I was particularly concerned about the middle east peace process, as I am now—we were convinced that the latest intervention should be dealt with there and then. We now need to answer the questions whether the regime needs to be dealt with and how should we deal with it.

The way in which the Government have suggested that we move forward—the way the Government have used their best influence on the American Administration, who were quite clearly split and probably still are quite split, as to how to resolve this issue—has been a lesson for us all.

I welcome the fact that we have been able to hear our Prime Minister tell us the role that the United Kingdom has played. It is clear that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have been able to help those in the American Administration who regarded international law as the way forward, in preference to the approach of drawing up a select hit list, followed by removal.

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

Those of us who have argued in the Chamber, on many different occasions, for the supremacy and legitimacy of international law and who wish to see it implemented much more rigorously all over the world should be heartened by the fact that we have been determined to help the United States of America to get in line with international law—to bring the matter back to the United Nations.

I should have hoped that my right hon. and hon. Friends who have disagreed with actions that have been taken in the past, and who have argued that the Security Council resolutions were ambivalent here or there, would welcome our determination to go back and obtain a new Security Council resolution. I have doubts as to whether it can be as specific as it needs to be—I have yet to read a UN Security Council resolution that was so specific that it did not allow someone to point to some ambiguity in it. However, I hope that our determination to go back and secure a new Security Council resolution will be enough to allow my hon. Friends who feel that they want to have some other debate to stay with us tonight and allow us to go to the United Nations Security Council and introduce that resolution.

Mr. Dawson: Does my hon. Friend agree that a large part of that resolution should be about the removal of sanctions in the event of Iraq's compliance with a UN resolution to allow UN weapons inspectors unfettered access to destroy weapons?

Mr. Ross: That is exactly what the resolutions say, and we might have had that debate today if Saddam Hussein had complied with those Security Council resolutions. I would have hoped that all my hon. Friends would be with us tonight in our determination.

I want to make one last comment. Many hon. Members have referred to the role of international law. I am someone who has specifically argued that it is a failure of the international community and the United States to allow international law to apply to the Israel-Palestine question that has got us into the situation that we are in today in the middle east.

The action of the Israeli defence forces in Ramallah was proof positive that unless we insist that international law is brought into the middle east peace process, we will not see an end to the way in which Israel treats its neighbour. The actions of the Israeli defence forces during the weekend in pulling down the Palestinian flag and raising the Israeli flag at the centre of the Palestinian presidential compound sent a simple message to the Palestinians: they do not exist. We need to remind Israel that, if there is to be peace, it has to have a partner, and that partner has to be a Palestinian community with rights equal to those of Israel.

5.21 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): When we are in an internationally dangerous situation, our first reaction should be to hold on tightly to international law. I was therefore pleased when the Prime Minister made his remarks earlier today to hear that he is clearly grounded in respect for the UN and reference to UN resolutions. However, the same cannot be said, unfortunately, about President Bush.

President Bush has continually said that Iraq must adhere to UN resolutions, but he has also said, without any sense of irony, that the US retains the right to take action unilaterally without UN approval if Iraq does not adhere to those resolutions. That somewhat weakens his case for enforcing resolutions on other countries. There is a further irony perhaps: if the US were able to mobilise the kind of coalition that was mobilised before the events in Afghanistan, the President may have more support around the world today, but very little effort has been made to do that.

Instead, President Bush has sought to dictate to the world what has to be done and has held a pistol to the UN, as we heard earlier, saying that unless the UN resolution is in the terms that the US wishes to have, it will block the return of weapons inspectors. That is not the behaviour of a multilateral partner in the international world today; it is the behaviour of the playground bully. It believes that it can dictate to the rest of the world because it is the only superpower. We have seen that behaviour in the contempt shown for the International Criminal Court, for Kyoto and, most recently, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said, at the Johannesburg summit.

There is a widespread perception—in a way it does not matter whether it is a perception or a reality—that the US motives in this episode are far from pure. They are not altruistic and intended to defend; they are in the self-interest of the US. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) referred to oil. I should like to refer to a piece published in *The Daily Telegraph* on 17 September, which said:

"Larry Lindsey, President George W Bush's economic adviser, said increased oil production in a free Iraq could drive down oil prices."

I quote directly from the White House. He said:

"When there is a regime change in Iraq"—

when there is—

"you could add three million to five million barrels [per day] of production to world supply. The successful prosecution of the war would be good for the economy."

In other words, if we are able to deal with Saddam Hussein—no doubt, killing a few people in the process—we can keep down the price of petrol. Those are not my words; they are those of the White House, and it has set out those intentions quite openly.

There is a widespread perception—again, it is not important whether it is a perception or a reality—that the mid-term elections are a factor. There is also a widespread perception that because President Bush has sadly failed—along with coalition allies across the world, including this country—to deal with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda that he is looking for an alternative focus for military action. So we have a choice.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) *rose—*

Norman Baker: I apologise for not giving way; I must make progress.

The most important message that we must send out is to adhere rigidly, to stick limpet-like, to the UN and its resolutions. I want the UN to deal with Iraq, and I want it to deal with a lot of other resolutions across the world that have not been dealt with. For example, the resolutions on Tibet have been gathering dust for 42 years in the UN

and no one has bothered about enforcing them against China. The resolutions on Israel and Palestine seem to be rather further down the agenda. So, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said earlier, let us deal with the resolutions and give them equal weight, not simply pick one out, as the Americans have done.

I am extremely worried by the concept of a pre-emptive strike—a matter raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. A pre-emptive strike is not allowed under the UN charter. There may be a case, as the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) put it, for saying that we would have wanted to take action if we had learned about Pearl Harbor 30 minutes in advance and that such action could have been justified, but that is an exception rather than the rule. There must be a very good reason indeed to take pre-emptive strikes. They are acts of aggression in international law, so what is the justification for such an act on this occasion?

It is certainly the case—the Prime Minister has made this very clear and I accept the evidence that he has put forward—that Saddam Hussein is accumulating really unpleasant and quite dangerous weapons of mass destruction. That is clear, but it is not clear who he is threatening or what his intentions are in respect of those weapons. I have no wish to defend him at all—he is a deeply unpleasant person—but so far as I am aware he has never threatened the United Kingdom, the European Union or the US. He has been in power for some time, which shows his political skills. He is not an irrational man. He is able to stay in power, and the last thing that he would do is to pick a fight with someone if he would lose, so I do not perceive a threat in that way to the UK at present.

I also query why we have moved away from the theory of deterrence. For 50 years, we have been told that this country has to have nuclear weapons because they are a deterrent and that, otherwise, we would be more open to attack. We are now being told that we are still open to attack from someone, even though we could respond in kind and obliterate him. Does Saddam want to be obliterated? He is a coward, who will pick on his own people and on Kuwait, but I suggest that he will not pick on the United States or the United Kingdom in that way.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Baker: I have only three minutes left.

We have to consider the risks of action, which were eloquently set out earlier by the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), such as the humanitarian consequences and the breakdown of international law. International law is not, as the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) suggested, the UK and the US acting together. That is a ridiculous definition of international law.

We must consider the fact that there is no obvious endgame. Who will replace Saddam Hussein? We must also consider the fact that the region will be destabilised, affecting our allies and those of the US, such as Saudi Arabia; that it will give Israel carte blanche to intensify its actions against the Palestinians while US attention is turned elsewhere; and that the Muslim world will be united and will regard Saddam as a hero. Those who saw the reports of the Johannesburg summit will know that evidence of that is already in place, unfortunately.

We must consider the fact that oil supplies and international markets will be disrupted and, perhaps most important, that such action will provide a recruiting ground for tourism—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, not for tourism; I have a south-coast seat. It will provide a recruiting ground for terrorism.

The way forward is that our Prime Minister has to make a choice. He said earlier that he regards the relations between this country and the US as a bedrock and vital, and I understand exactly why he does so. He also recognises the value of the UN, and he has made that very clear in his contributions today and on other occasions. However, he may not be able to bridge the gap. He may have to jump at some point and choose either to support unilateral action by the US or to support the UN and let the US go it alone. I think that the US will go it alone whether we agree with it or not. If that happens, we should be on the side of the UN, not on that of the US.

My final point is that we should not be involved in any military action unless there is an explicit UN mandate for it. That is one bottom line. The second bottom line is that we should not be involved in any military action unless the House of Commons has seen the terms and has voted on it.

5.30 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): A number of those who have spoken and who have expressed doubts about the Americans' approach to this crisis have called on the Prime Minister to use his friendship with President Bush to influence American policy. It is worth my saying at the outset that that is precisely what the Prime Minister has done. I have no doubt that if he had not done so, this matter would not be as it is today—the United Nations Security Council being determined in the way that I believe that it will be.

That is important because it is the responsibility of the whole international community to build up the United Nations and to make it into the hard instrument of collective international action that it was originally designed to be. If we see this business through and play it properly, as I believe that the Government are, the United Nations will be strengthened in precisely the direction that we on the Labour Benches, who are passionate internationalists, want it to evolve.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mandelson: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

Dealing with Saddam is now a very challenging test for the United Nations—its greatest in recent memory, and one that I passionately believe it must not fail for the sake of the organisation's future credibility. Acting toughly and decisively through the UN, with its use of diplomacy backed by the threat of coercive action if necessary, offers the only possibility in this crisis of both avoiding war and removing the danger posed by Saddam's chemical, biological and nuclear programmes. That should be our compass. However, that will be achieved only if the UN Security Council stands resolute and united in any action

[Mr. Mandelson]

that it undertakes. Diplomacy alone, as we all know, will easily be brushed aside by Saddam. Knowing that this time the international community means what it says is the only way to make him see sense and decide to disarm.

We are not talking about some old grenades, a few rusty rifles and a couple of bags of Semtex. We are talking about weapons with a capability that threatens Iraq's neighbours, destabilises the region and can be transferred only too easily to international terrorist networks. We should base our actions on a judgment of capability not of intent. Having said that, I ask Members why Saddam should wish to retain these weapons if he does not intend or wish to retain the ability to use them.

Of course people want to avoid war, especially action that will harm innocent people. I share that aim, but the way to avoid war is to make the UN route work effectively—confronting Saddam by that means in the expectation that, if the international community is genuinely united, tough and determined enough, Saddam will give way to the UN and disarm. The UN Security Council therefore needs to agree a clear, fresh statement of its views so that there is absolutely no ambiguity about where the international community stands on the matter.

The last thing that we should do now is lift the pressure on Saddam. He is at last listening to what the United Nations is saying, even though he still refuses at this stage to come into line. We must maintain and increase the pressure on him so that he complies with UN demands, and not allow disagreement in the Security Council to continue to paralyse the UN's essential role, as we have seen during the past decade and before.

We should not allow our resolve to be shaken in any way by Saddam's recent ploy of purporting to invite the weapons inspectors to resume their work—reverting to the relatively weak three-year-old set of inspection arrangements that got us absolutely nowhere before. Saddam wants the evasion and obfuscation to start again. I became familiar with that dynamic—rather, an undynamic—in dealing with arms in Northern Ireland, but in this case it is so much more serious because of the nature of the weapons involved.

We must be clear what it would mean to indulge Saddam's tactics, as I am afraid some of those who have spoken seem to want to do, and to permit the weapons inspection regime to be compromised. It would mean without doubt leaving Saddam's weapons programmes in place. Those who criticise the Government's more assertive approach must be honest. They have to say candidly that they are prepared to leave Saddam's weapons in place because they do not like the risk or the unattractiveness of the alternative course of action. Judging by the performance today of the leader of the Liberal Democrat party and his speeches and past radio comments, he must face up to that and be clear about it. At the moment, his lack of consistency and his incoherence mean that he is trying to have this all ways and will have it no way.

If we do not take the decisive action that needs to be taken by the UN Security Council, we will not only leave the unique danger of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction in place but reinforce in the United States precisely the trend that America's critics say that they deplore. If the UN does not follow through, if the Security Council does not stay firm and bring forward the clear resolution that it needs to, American confidence in the United Nations, such as it is, will simply collapse. The Americans would conclude that they were right to question going along the UN route in the first place, and American unilateralism would be boosted, with all the dangers that that would hold for the world.

Some in Europe seem to fear American unilateralism more than they fear Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, but if they do not stand up to Saddam this time, American unilateralism will be strengthened. It will not be forced into retreat. Is the collapse of the UN, which would only strengthen and boost the hawks in the American Administration, really what such critics want? Does anyone imagine that that would hold out anything that is good for the world? We must follow a policy that avoids both Saddam retaining his weapons and American hawks being strengthened in the process.

The bargain that we want to strike with the United States is that it temper its unilateralist approach to international affairs in return for the rest of the world making multilateralism work as it should and needs to in the United Nations. It is above all Europe's responsibility to make that happen. It must use its weight and skill to partner the United States in international affairs in order to strengthen the multilateralist approach in the American Administration as we want. The consequences of the failure to do that were brought home to me on a recent visit to south-east Asia where I met and addressed Muslim organisations in a number of countries. It would be a recipe for polarisation between the world's peoples—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

5.40 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): It is because I think that we will have to take action against Saddam Hussein's regime that I am so concerned by the way in which the debate has been going in this country and in the United States. It is precisely because we have to face up to the threat of Saddam Hussein that we must be careful that we do not allow the debate in the west to continue in the way that it has. If it continues in that way, I do not believe that public opinion will be firmly behind any action. It will be extremely dangerous even for America, with all its military might, to take action with a fragmented international coalition.

Just under a year ago, we had a debate in the Chamber on the consequences of the disaster on 11 September. At that point, I said that it was the role of the British Government to do their best to influence people in Washington who understood that America's strength would be greater if there were an international coalition working with it. America has lost that understanding, and it is not the fault of the British Prime Minister that it has done so. I think—I certainly hope—that the influence that he has tried to use in Washington has drawn attention to the importance of wider international issues and of the United Nations.

America has taken the more unilateral route that I was worried about a year ago. It has done so not just in the military sphere but, for example, in the way in which it introduced subsidies for farmers, in how it almost swept aside the international environmental treaties and in its reaction to the International Criminal Court. Those are worrying signs.

The United States and, certainly, the Bush Administration have decided that they are at war. America has failed to find Osama bin Laden, so one has the feeling that it has decided that it has to find someone else to be at war with. It happens to be Iraq. Do not misunderstand me. The evidence in the dossier is credible and probably understated. However, if we are to take action on that, we must believe that it is the real focus for international attention and not compensation for the fact that the Americans cannot tell their electorate before the elections on 5 November that they have failed to find Osama bin Laden. It was not long ago that the United States tried to say to the world that Iraq was a danger because of its link with al-Qaeda. Now that does not appear to be a credible part of the evidence against Saddam Hussein. The confusion is worrying people who are not against military action. They want to know why it is necessary and why now.

America has recently announced its new security strategy. Some of the things in it are very worrying. It says:

"We will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defence by acting pre-emptively against such terrorists."

I have to say to my American friends that if they are not careful, the very action that they take in the international arena will provoke far more terrorism than we have yet seen. Incautious action against the evil regime in Iraq could well destabilise neighbouring countries in the middle east and send a message to Muslim and other terrorists worldwide that America is now fair game.

American cloaks its strategy with words from a sort of gospel, saying:

"In the war against global terrorism, we will never forget that we are ultimately fighting for our democratic values and way of life."

I understand that, and the strategy later says:

"The lessons of history are clear: market economies, not command-and-control economies with the heavy hand of government, are the best way to promote prosperity and reduce poverty."

I happen to agree with that. However, if that is the rallying call that the United States is using, it is being insensitive to the reality of the rest of the world, which does not necessarily share those values.

The shrewd American commentator Joseph S. Nye, in the book "The Paradox of American Power", drew attention to precisely the fact that, at the point at which America is most capable militarily of conquering any other nation, it might misunderstand the fact that that very power will alienate other people to the extent that they decide to take terrorist action against the United States. It is incumbent on the most powerful nation in the world to use the other machinery that it has available—the soft policy that Joseph S. Nye mentions. It should have the ability to persuade the rest of the world that American culture is not something that it should be alienated by but something that is there to help the lives of people throughout the world.

America should also try to articulate with us what sort of future the people of Iraq will have without Saddam Hussein. In many people's minds, there is still the danger that Iraq may end up with a more fundamentalist regime that could cause other problems. We have not articulated those issues. Indeed, until today, I had not heard Opposition Front Benchers articulate the questions so ably put by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). They are essential if we are to engage the British public. Unless we engage them, no amount of dossiers on the threat that Saddam Hussein poses will be convincing.

We must also re-engage and reanimate the United Nations, an organisation that admittedly from time to time becomes flabby and concerned merely with its own structure. It has to take the threats seriously, but we must make it equally clear to the UN and to our fellow members of the Security Council that the UN, and not the American President alone, must start to worry about the world order and where terrorism is most likely to have a disruptive effect. If we can do that, we can at least begin to engage other people. For example, we are not engaging President Putin of Russia, a country that was much mentioned in our debates after 11 September but that has not been mentioned until this moment today.

If we are not careful, the fragmented international coalition will start to create other problems that will ultimately affect the United States and we will be swept along somewhere in the middle, powerless to intervene. We must not allow a discontinuity of interest between Moscow and Washington to occur, and nor must we allow—a point that the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) made—Europe to become fragmented. Schröder was far too opportunistic in the way that he used the issue of Iraq in German politics, but we should use our influence, with the Prime Minister meeting him, to try to rebuild a more common policy in Europe that will have its own influence in the UN so that its will is strengthened and so that it will not be brushed away by regimes such as that run by Saddam Hussein.

I believe that there will be a great danger to world stability if we take action that is not channelled through and endorsed by the United Nations. I do not believe that it is even in America's best interest to take pre-emptive or unilateral action. If we in the House can raise our voices loud enough to be heard not only in Washington but around this country, and make it clear that we are not simply acceding to American leadership but attempting to ensure that American military power can be used for good in the world, we will have achieved something by the recall of Parliament. We will be playing our proper role in the democratic process, and we might even achieve a greater prospect of peace.

5.49 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I congratulate the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) on a speech that crystallised the central and essential concerns of the British people. I have heard those concerns directly from my constituents and via my postbag, to which my constituents and people from the wider United Kingdom contribute.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the paradox of American power. My constituents are confused by what they perceive as the paradoxical attitude of the United States Administration to the United Nations. They are equally bemused by their own Government's perceived attachment to what they define as an abuse of the United Nations, which came into being at the end of the second world war with a very simple idea—that there was a better way for nation states to solve their problems than going to war. My constituents are confused, as I am up to a point, by the way in which Saddam Hussein, for whom neither they nor I hold any brief, has become the

[Glenda Jackson]

quintessence of evil when, not long ago, he was actively supported, maintained and financed by, for example, the United States. How has he has become a greater danger in the past year than he has been in the previous 11 on the issue of weapons of mass destruction?

I was grateful that the Government responded to concerns and agreed to the recall of Parliament. I am less happy about the fact that in some cases being able to voice our constituents' concerns has been presented as a privilege for the House, not a right. I am not particularly pleased that the dossier was published only at 8 o'clock this morning. However, to be honest, I did not expect, as has already been said, to find a smoking gun within its pages—there is no such gun.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) highlighted concerns felt across the United Kingdom—what is the desirable outcome if we go to war against Iraq? I feel strongly about any kind of military action being entered into without the validation of the UN, and I know that my constituents do too. I feel equally strongly about the fact that at one point we were being told that it was imperative that we go to war against Iraq because it had the temerity to ignore UN resolutions. It is not the only nation state to ignore UN resolutions, so are we setting a pattern for the future? Having flattened Iraq, will we go into Israel, Pakistan, India and Turkey?

More than once this afternoon the argument has been made that Saddam Hussein is the quintessence of evil because he has an appalling record on human rights—no one would contest that—but if the argument is that the way in which nation states treat their citizens can warrant military action, what about Burma? I cite Burma because my constituents and I feel strongly about the issue, but should the abuse of human rights become an immediate argument for a pre-emptive strike against a nation state the list of such states would be endless. The idea that we are in real and present danger from one rogue state has yet to be proved to the satisfaction of myself and my constituents, who are concerned that we could dragged along on the coat-tails of the American Administration. I use the word "Administration" advisedly as "America" and "Americans" have sometimes been used too loosely in this afternoon's debate. I have many American friends and have always been treated with great generosity and courtesy by America and Americans. There is a powerful body of opinion in the nation state of America that is appalled by its own Government's proposals and the way in which they keep pushing for some form of validation for an attack on Iraq.

As I have said, I hold no brief for Saddam Hussein or his regime, but I am extremely concerned about the fact that we may act without proper examination or without calling his bluff. It is as simple as that—call his bluff. He has said that he will allow UN inspectors in, so they should go—let us see whether he affords them open access to all the areas they wish to examine. Heaven knows, they know which areas they wish to examine. If, indeed, he puts barriers in their way, the UN should act, but we should delay for quite a long time before we risk military action against Iraq.

There is no question but that the war would be won by the most powerful nation in the world, but I am concerned about who will win the peace. We have had quite a few history lessons this afternoon and the second world war has been cited on more than one occasion. At the end of that war, the world was almost destroyed and the two major aggressive nations were put into a process that transformed not only their political basis but their cultural attitude to politics and what a nation state should be. I am obviously thinking about Japan and Germany. In Japan, that task was almost exclusively the preserve of the United States, but in Germany it required co-operation between four countries that have since become permanent members of the UN Security Council. A great deal more was required—these nation states were clearly committed to staying in Germany for a considerable period. Year after year, there was a massive commitment of money, materials and personnel to bring about change.

Are we prepared to commit ourselves to that in Iraq? As hon. Members have said, the idea that regime change will automatically bring in an infinitely better Government is absurd. The three Opposition parties in Iraq cannot agree with one another and it is highly unlikely that they could create any kind of Government who would receive a modicum of respect or loyalty from the Iraqi people. Do we really think that Saddam Hussein and his cohorts will sit quietly in one of his palaces until they are killed or captured? Of course not. Women, children, the elderly and the sick will, as always, be victims of attack, but Saddam Hussein and his cohorts will be outside the country, plotting and acting as a focus for opposition to any Government who are imposed on Iraq. As hon. Members have said, they will act as the best kind of recruiting sergeant for extremist fanatics from any religion the like of which the world has not seen before.

The argument for a pre-emptive military strike against Iraq has not been thought through sufficiently by the main protagonists. There should be an immediate return to the United Nations. If we need another mandate, we should not make it impossible for Saddam Hussein to acknowledge its time scales. I have heard it said that the American Administration are pushing for military action by the new year because if they leave it any later it will be too hot and dangerous for their troops and any others who may be engaged in fighting in the desert.

The weapons inspectors are ready to go back in. They have made it clear that it will take time for them to get there and examine the areas that they believe could be dangerous. It should be in the interests not only of this country and the United States but the whole free world and that vast stretch of the world that longs to be free to afford those inspectors the time to make a genuine inspection and report. Only then should we seriously consider some kind of military action against Iraq.

5.59 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I shall not follow the points made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) in her powerful speech, save to say that I prefer the advice given to the House by the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). We are not about to go to war either this week, next week or next month, and some of the points made by the hon. Lady are based upon a misunderstanding, perhaps an exaggerated misunderstanding, of the situation.

It is never easy to take part in debates such as this because, despite the publication of the dossier of information before us today, only a few people in government can know the whole truth. What we have

today is what they want us to have, and I welcome what we have been given, but we are arguing this matter from a position of some ignorance. We do not have the detailed intelligence reports, and we do not have access to the signals traffic or the material that the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary have from people on the ground or from their discussions with the United States Government.

It would have been helpful to our deliberations had the dossier been published some time before this morning. I am sure that there is nothing in it that was not available last week, and if it is right to let us have the information today it was surely right to let us have it last week or even earlier.

Equally, this debate is taking place too late. Had it been open to us to question the Government, and in particular the Prime Minister, earlier about their plans, their policy, their hopes and their fears about the worsening situation in Iraq and in our relations with that country's regime, and their discussions with the President and Administration of the United States, much good, I suspect, would have flowed from that and far less of comfort to Saddam Hussein. The delay has allowed frustrations to grow, and, unwittingly no doubt, has allowed the impression to be gained in Iraq that we are not resolved to do anything, that we do not have the political will as a country to shoulder the responsibilities of which the Prime Minister has spoken.

If it is said that we had nothing of substance to debate earlier than today, I fundamentally disagree. The prospect of war is substantial enough for Members of this House to want to express their collective or individual views, and if information of the kind that can be shared by the Prime Minister becomes available subsequently, the House can be recalled once more if necessary. This is not an argument between Parliament and the Executive, or about the prerogative powers of the Crown in matters of foreign policy. It is a matter of common sense not to allow tempers to remain too hot for too long as elected Members of this House accumulate their frustration and anger at being apparently ignored while events outside the House that concern us continue.

I welcome the recall of Parliament, but at this time of crisis we need to see the Prime Minister metaphorically, if not literally, chained by one wrist to the Dispatch Box, so that he and the Government are reminded of their relationship with the electorate. At this time of crisis we should not only do our duty to the electorate and our country in standing up for the rights of Parliament, but show the regime in Iraq that parliamentary democracy matters and that parliamentary democracy can play its part in vanquishing terror. That does not mean that Parliament should listen only to the electorate. It also means that Parliament and Members of it have a role in shaping and leading public opinion.

On 19 November last year during the debate on the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, I admitted that the decisions that have to be taken by the Prime Minister at times like this are truly awful. He is in the lonely position of having to make the final decision about whether we should commit troops to theatres of war, to places of actual or potential danger. All of us, no matter whether we are Government or Opposition Members of Parliament, have our responsibilities at this time, to our constituents, to our families, to our country, to our allies, and, of course, to our consciences, but we cannot shirk from our duty to take difficult decisions if that is what we must do.

The burden on a national leader at times like this is great. I sympathise with the Prime Minister. Indeed I do more than that. I support him and the stance that he is taking in being prepared to face head on the issues that a man such as Saddam Hussein puts before us. The right hon. Gentleman has been derided for behaving as though he were no more than President Bush's poodle, jumping to his every wish and command in order to increase his standing as a world leader at home at a time when domestic politics are proving less inviting. He is accused of being out of step with the majority of the parliamentary Labour party and the party's membership outside.

The Prime Minister's behaviour is made all the worse, his critics say, because the United States Government are headed by a President with an eccentric command of the English language, a man on a personal mission to finish off what his father failed to complete in 1991, and a man who heads an Administration staffed by men and women with no real understanding of the delicate state of the political world in the middle east. Indeed, it is fashionable in some quarters here to belittle the imagination, the sophistication, the ability to think strategically and the generosity of spirit of the American people, their President and his close advisers. If the Prime Minister is on side with them, say his critics, he must be badly awry.

Those critics may be sincere, they may be reflecting the views of many others in this country and for all I know they may represent the majority. But they are wrong and they are giving the cause of peace in the middle east and in the wider world no assistance, either by the style of their criticism or by its content. The caricature that they paint of the President and his advisers, and thus of the Prime Minister, is inaccurate and is, in my view, at the very lowest, unhelpful in bringing Saddam Hussein to see reason. No one who has sent troops to war can be unaware of what that could mean for the individual service men and women involved or for their families. But if we avoided preparing for war because we knew that it would bring casualties, we would not have a Government worthy of the name, nor a country or a way of life worth living in or protecting.

No President of the United States will lightly decide to commit forces overseas just because he has almost unlimited military might at his disposal. A wrong decision by the world's only superpower has repercussions for it as well as for the rest of the world and I find it unbelievable that President Bush is mindlessly about to set off on an adventure for the sheer bravado of it. Any operation against Iraq—if it comes to that, and we are a long way from that—will be considered with great care and, I have no doubt, with advice and warnings from his own staff, Congress, the press, the academic world, members of the United Nations Security Council and other opinion formers, as well as, and this is not an insignificant factor, from the British Government.

While other countries who stand to benefit from what the United States and Britain are having to contemplate shuffle uneasily from one side of the argument to the other, it is reassuring to find that the United Kingdom Government is not proving so pusillanimous. The United Kingdom has a long-standing and high reputation for persuasive diplomacy and resolution drafting at the United

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

Nations, and now is the time that our Government must urge those who are working for us in New York to demonstrate those skills quickly and effectively.

Hussein is a murderous tyrant who unfortunately survived the Gulf war to continue his regime of terror, torture, assassination and extermination of racial groups and individuals who have inconvenienced him. We know from his pre-1991 behaviour that he is not a man to be trusted and that his military and political subordinates are either as bad as him or terrified into obedience. We know that since 1991, despite the best efforts of the United Nations weapons inspectors, he has been producing chemical and biological weapons and attempting to produce nuclear weapons with long-range delivery systems. We know that his interest in their manufacture is not merely academic. A man who is prepared to use chemical weapons on his own citizens is hardly likely to be too scrupulous to use them on the citizens of other countries. A man who was prepared to fire missiles at Israel and risk another regional war between Israel and the Arab world with the chance that it might lead to war on a far wider scale will not now shrink from doing so again if that is what he thinks will achieve his ends.

I said on 4 October last year in the post-11 September debate at column 724 that I accept that in times of crisis any Prime Minister must be provided with the freedom to act quickly and effectively to protect the integrity of the country and its institutions and to safeguard its people. I applaud what the Prime Minister has said and done so far. I accept that not every decision that has to be taken can be taken following lengthy deliberations in the House or consultations with every interested party. I accept without question that if the Prime Minister says that he has evidence against Saddam Hussein that he cannot share with us in full, he is speaking the truth.

But the threat to this country may not come from warships or aircraft, from nuclear missiles sent from Baghdad or a land army invading one of our allies. The modern adversary may well travel by bus, with a belt loaded with explosives or a briefcase full of germs in one hand and a laptop computer in the other. He will not wear a uniform, he will not announce his coming and he will not share his plans. But what he may well be is a person trained, funded and armed by Saddam Hussein, prepared to kill himself and many others so that Saddam's murderous aims can be fulfilled. It is that sort of threat that Iraq poses and it is that sort of threat that we must compel the United Nations to take on board.

It is no good us asking the Security Council to pass further resolutions unless we and it are prepared to take action when they are ignored or broken. The new Security Council resolution that has been spoken of today will be ignored or broken by Saddam Hussein, just like the others since 1991, unless he knows that he is faced with countries and leaders with the determination, the resolve, the political will and the military might to deal with him swiftly and decisively in the event of default. That means—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman's time is up.

6.9 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I welcome today's debate on Iraq. It is about time Parliament had the opportunity to discuss the Government's position. Everybody else in the world seems to have been doing so for months.

I want to make two points. The first concerns the dossier that the Government have finally managed to publish after all this time—we have been asking for its publication since March. The second concerns the wider significance of the issues before us.

The Government have done their very best in today's debate narrowly to cast around for the evidence—or otherwise—of Iraq's capability of developing weapons of mass destruction. The contents of the dossier have been trailed in the press and on the air for days, but Members of the House received it only a few hours before the debate and have had little time to read or digest it. If I were being cynical, I might say that that was deliberate, so that anyone who is a sceptic, like me, might have less time to expose all the holes in the Government's case. There are many others who are sceptical about the Government's position.

I believe that this is an attempt to put an official seal of approval on speculation. The fact that all of us in the House believe that Saddam Hussein is a very bad man does not make a case for war. Indeed, some of us have a more honourable record of opposition to his antics, going back many years, than some who have spoken today. Indeed, I remember my hon. Friends the Members for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) leading campaign after campaign to highlight the wickedness of this particular regime.

The Government are doing their best to confuse two issues, and we have to ask ourselves why. I could not disagree more with hon. Members who have said that all the evidence is here in the dossier. Because I have been sitting here for eight hours, I have now had the chance to read it three or four times. It is light on fact, and heavy on conjecture. It is also light on argument and heavy on emotion. In fact, if it were an A-level answer, the examiners would downgrade it with no hesitation whatever.

Speculation is no longer necessary, because the United Nations weapons inspectors are due to return in a few weeks. We have to ask ourselves why, after having procrastinated for half a year, the Government have rushed the dossier out now, at the very point when the situation is poised to be resolved without recourse to war, and when a non-military solution is practical, possible and immediately on the agenda. Why should we bother to speculate, when the United Nations is on the point of being able to observe the situation for itself, and when Hans Blix has told us that he can have the inspectors in, and up and running, by the middle of October?

Why move the goalposts now? It could not be—could it?—that the Prime Minister is hunting for a way to support President Bush and the United States in going to war. I think that that is their intention, with or without UN approval, regardless of whether weapons monitoring is re-established. The Prime Minister has already said, when he addressed the press in Sedgefield, that he would support the United States. A lot of Members of this House think that the Prime Minister wants to support the United States regardless of the UN, and I agree with them. What other reason is there for the Government to publish a

dossier that we have all been clamouring for since the beginning of the year, allowing it to be leaked and speculated on in the press for days, but withholding it from this country's elected representatives until three hours before the debate in this Chamber?

I want to turn briefly to the broader issues—issues that the Government are seeking to obscure in the flurry of speculation about this redundant document. Saddam Hussein has not used these so-called weapons of mass destruction. He did not use them in 1991, when we were flattening his country and killing his people. He has not used them for 12 years, and he would invite annihilation if he used them now. I go along with the annihilation argument. I think that he is rational, even if he is wicked, and I do not think that he would invite his own annihilation.

It is clear that George Bush has decided to go to war against Iraq, regardless of the matters before us in the Government's dossier. It has been said that the Prime Minister was instrumental in getting President Bush to go to the United Nations, where he made his speech. Well, if he was, President Bush has betrayed him, because just a few days later, we got the Bush doctrine. We found out that President Bush was taking it upon himself and America to launch pre-emptive strikes if he came across anybody he thought was against America's interests. Colin Powell announced that months ago, when he said on American television:

"US policy is that, regardless of what the inspectors do, the people of Iraq and the people of the region would be better off with a different regime in Baghdad. The United States reserves its option to do whatever it believes might be appropriate to see if there can be a regime change."

That is the United States' case, and it has betrayed the Prime Minister if he was intent on persuading it to go down the United Nations route.

It is clear that President Bush is set on regime change, not because Saddam Hussein has, or is capable of developing, weapons of mass destruction—the United States bears considerable responsibility for encouraging Iraq to acquire them in the first place—but because George Bush wants a different Government. We have to ask ourselves why. It is because Iraq is sitting on top of huge oil reserves, and the United States—the world's biggest oil consumer—wants to make sure it can get its hands on them.

Before we are prepared to participate in what the United States is doing, we should ask ourselves an important question—particularly in the light of the Bush doctrine revealed last Friday. Who is next? Will it be Syria, Iran, North Korea, Yemen? The list is endless. Who will be next if we allow ourselves to go down this route?

The Bush Administration are taking upon themselves the power to decide which country is likely to pose a challenge to United States interests in future, and to act in advance to stop that happening—by force, if need be. Who made George Bush the judge and jury of the world? Who gave him that absolute right? If this is allowed to happen, we can kiss the rule of international law goodbye. We can kiss goodbye to arms limitation treaties and arms inspections as well. More countries will be looking for access to weapons of mass destruction, seeing them as their only means of counterbalancing a rampant United States. The Bush security doctrine represents the militarisation of American foreign policy. It makes me shudder to think about the kind of future my children and grandchildren have in store, and it should make every sensible Member in this Chamber shudder too.

The matters that we are considering today could end in the Government following the United States to war against Iraq. They would be doing so without the support of the majority of the British electorate. Although some of us have been able to speak today, many have not; many are still hoping to be called. It is a travesty of democracy that we have not been allowed a proper vote on this matter. The only option for those who want to show our disgust that we might be dragged down this route to war is to vote against the motion on the Adjournment tonight. The public are expecting that. It is a betrayal of public trust that we have not been given a vote.

I was born into a party in which a Prime Minister crossed the Atlantic to prevent his friends from using nuclear weapons in Korea. Another Prime Minister kept us out of the Vietnam war, with all the horrors that that involved, when the United States used chemical weapons and killed 2 million Vietnamese and 55,000 of its own young people. I want my Prime Minister to pursue pathways to peace, and to pursue non-military solutions to what is a very difficult problem for us all.

6.18 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I have just returned this morning from the United States of America, having flown out there on 11 September. Subjective as it is, my impression of the mood in America is very different from some that we have heard in the Chamber today. My impression of that mood is that it is one of grief, reflectiveness and a steady determination not to suffer the sort of horror that they suffered 12 months ago.

On my return today, I am therefore disappointed—although not entirely surprised—to find comments being reported in the press from the Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton, in which their leader stated there that there was

"more than a hint of imperialism"

about what America was doing. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I hope that the record will show Liberal Democrats cheering those remarks. Another Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman is similarly reported as having described the United States' democratically elected Government as a "regime"—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the record will show Liberal Democrats laughing and sneering in support of those remarks in today's debate.

We heard today the Liberal Democrat hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) describe the United States, after all that it has been through in the past year, as nothing better than a "playground bully". A little more surprising than the facile and hostile comments of the Liberal Democrats are the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor), who seems to think that the United States has not had significant success in the war against al-Qaeda. I beg to differ. Any look at the recent record of what has been happening in the war against al-Qaeda bears out the interpretation that the United States has been doing very well indeed.

On 11 September this year, Ramzi bin al-Shibh was arrested in Pakistan as a result of American intelligence tip-offs. That follows a successfully established pattern of reeling in key terrorists one by one. It may well be that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who is believed to have been

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

the military head of al-Qaeda and who boasted in a recent broadcast that he had first conceived the idea of flying aircraft into American buildings, may have been captured or killed in the same raid. We know about the previous capture of Abu Zubeida, al-Qaeda's chief of operations. So it is stretching the imagination to suggest that America's concern with Iraq is based on nothing more than a diversionary need to compensate for as yet inadequate action against al-Qaeda.

It has been asked today whether a state can act without United Nations' authority. I suggest to the House that there is at least one set of circumstances in which a state can do so: when the United Nations fails to enforce its own resolutions if those have been flagrantly disregarded. I have in mind the letter that was quoted in part during the Prime Minister's statement earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. The letter was sent by the weapons inspector, Scott Ritter, at the time of his resignation in 1998, before he suddenly decided, years later, that Saddam Hussein did not pose a threat from mass destruction weapons after all. The letter stated:

"The sad truth is that Iraq today is not disarmed anywhere near the level required by Security Council resolutions . . . Iraq has lied to the Special Commission and the world since day one . . . the Commission has uncovered indisputable proof of a systematic concealment mechanism run by the Presidency of Iraq and protected by Iraqi security forces."

Mr. Ritter concluded:

"The issue of immediate, unrestricted access is, in my opinion, an issue worth fighting for."

If even Scott Ritter, who has become something of a hero to Labour Members who are against war, felt at the time when he had adequate knowledge that the enforcement of those resolutions was worth fighting for, perhaps the Prime Minister is not too far adrift in expressing a similar opinion in the light of his up-to-date knowledge—his full knowledge, awareness and concern, which we as a loyal Opposition have supported consistently—about what Saddam Hussein may well try to do.

When is pre-emption justified? I suggest it is when someone with evil intent seeks to acquire devastating capability. It would be very hard to justify overthrowing Saddam if he were seeking mass destruction weapons for deterrent purposes, but that man's record is not one of deterrence; rather, it is a record of aggression, invasion and mass murder.

When Afghanistan was attacked and the Taliban were overthrown, far fewer voices were raised against Anglo-US action than are being raised in today's debate. Why is that? It is because the attacks against the United States had already taken place out of the blue. I was impressed by the Prime Minister's argument, used in his earlier press conference although not in the House today, about pre-emption. He pointed out that had he or President Bush come to their electorates on 9 or 10 September 2001 and said, "We have intelligence information that makes us believe with a reasonably secure level of assuredness that al-Qaeda is about to launch an horrific attack; we do not know the details, the precise timing, or the location, but we wish to take pre-emptive action against this group," the reaction would have been similar to that being shown by Members on the left of the Labour party and by the Liberal Democrats as a whole to the suggestion that pre-emptive action may be necessary against Saddam Hussein.

The difference between those two situations is this: it is one thing for a terrorist group to kill 3,000 innocent people without warning out of the blue, but it is quite another for a mass murderer, a dictator and a tyrant to be able to launch out of the blue an attack with mass destruction weapons, especially when—I was delighted when my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) brought this out in his speech—it may be done by proxy. It may be done by means of supplying the weapons of mass destruction to third parties, while Saddam Hussein sits back, washes his hands and says, "It's nothing to do with me."

The Arab world has a pretty good idea of what Saddam Hussein is like and is unlikely to be set ablaze in the cause of protecting him. I remember well when, in 1991, Saddam tried to declare a holy war and claim that his aggression was part of a jihad. In reality, the Arab world took little notice.

I conclude on a hopeful note. A recent report of the comments of the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, shows that perhaps after all Saudi Arabia will allow the US to strike Iraq from Saudi bases. That is against what the Saudis were saying previously, but they know that ultimately Saddam Hussein is no friend of the Arab cause any more than he is a friend of democracy or of the Iraqi people.

6.28 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I went to the United States 10 days ago. It is the fifth time that I have visited it this year and the seventh time since 9/11, as the Americans say. I was scheduled to return on 6 October, but I had to start coming back last Wednesday because that was the latest that I could leave in order to get here on time for this debate. I am pleased that I made it because, having sat in the Chamber throughout the day, I have heard many of the arguments that I would have made myself.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) made a remarkable statement. It is astonishing for me to make that admission in here, as it is for me to commend the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who also made a thoroughly good contribution. The defence spokesman for the second Opposition party also made a contribution with which I could agree in great measure. I should, however, give the real credit to colleagues such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), who delivered a characteristically sharp analysis of the situation in which we have been placed. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) did fairly well too, although she is not present to hear me say so. So did my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and whatever the other part of the constituency is. [HON. MEMBERS: "Highgate."] Yes, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson).

I was not very pleased about the sniggers and smirks that were evident in some quarters during the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) and for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway). Although I might not have used the same emphasis or the same forms of expression, I feel that much of what they said deserves careful consideration.

A good deal of what I wanted to say has already been said, so I will not repeat it. I will concentrate on the attitude that I left in the United States. I know the United States quite well, because we have a house there. Every time I walk the dog, I see "America At War". I see that on every newscast, every day and throughout the day. It has continued for 12 months. The only way of gaining a balanced view of what is happening in the world is to tune in to the Canadian Newsline International, which transmits excerpts from various national programmes with a voice-over interpretation. We must, of course, trust the Canadians to interpret the situation correctly. They do not always interpret accurately, as we well know from our experience of the NATO parliamentary assembly. Anyway, Newsline International is good.

Last week the Pax channel broadcast a programme putting together the words of St. Malachy, 1,000 years old, and those of Nostradamus, 600 years less old. The combined prophecies identified the Islam of today, and their predictions included the European Union, which would join Islam to bring about Armageddon. Armageddon would mean the destruction of the world—but there was something to stop that: President Bush.

Anyone who believes in predictions—and I suppose that someone who quotes St. Malachy and Nostradamus must have some faith in them—is hardly going to believe that a President of the United States will be able to withstand the onslaught of Armageddon. If the predictions are so reliable, how come Armageddon will be so uncertain that Bush will be able to overturn it?

Why should America be so keen to whip up the crazy state of mind that suggests there is no alternative to the attack on Iraq that is described so incessantly and in such detail? Could it have anything to do with Enron, WorldCom, Xerox and a number of other court actions currently in train? Could it have anything to do with the fact that in less than two months a major election process will take place in the United States? For some time there have been predictions that Bush will lose support in both Houses. Could it be that this is a means of distracting attention from such serious considerations? I suggest that there is probably a connection.

What, though, is the real danger of pursuing this folly? Members should consider today's press reports about Mr. Rumsfeld. Apparently, he is seeking support in NATO for a NATO pursuit of rogue states. We must assume that by "rogue states" he means Iraq. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate said, if we pursue Iraq and sort it out, who will be next?

We have talked about human rights, and about UN resolutions that have been ignored. We have talked about the possession of weapons of mass destruction. I suppose that must mean that the next candidate will be China. Can we seriously consider that China might even begin to enter the list of probabilities? Obviously not.

The simple truth is that Iraq poses no risk to the United Kingdom, or to the United States. If, as is stated on the front page of today's *Evening Standard*, Iraq has the capacity to strike within 45 minutes, as soon as we launch an attack it can launch a reactive, rather than pre-emptive, attack on us—and then the whole world will go crazy. Is there any sense at all in this? I suggest that there is not.

We are friends of America. We always have been, and I hope we will always stay that way. As I have confessed, I have a vested interest. I think that, as friends, we ought to tell the Americans that it is not the emperor but the President who has no clothes. He is displaying himself as, sadly, somewhat less than well informed. Perhaps, with the election in mind, he will drop the idea once his campaign is over—for that is, I think, his main motivation.

6.36 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Like, I am sure, many colleagues, I have spent part of the recess seeing rather more of my constituents than is usually possible. I have toured my constituency, visiting about 100 villages. I was astonished to find that the one topic they all wanted to discuss with me was precisely the topic we are discussing today. I was also surprised by the fact that they wanted to make almost identical points.

There were three issues. First, my constituents were astonished that the House had not been recalled yet, and that the Government were showing every sign of reluctance to allow a recall. Secondly, they were astonished that I, as their Member of Parliament, would not have an opportunity to vote—on a substantive motion—for or against the action that the Government proposed to take. Thirdly, they wanted to express deep concern. What surprised me about that was that the sentiment applied across the political spectrum, from people whom I knew to be convinced Conservatives to those of quite different political persuasions. It included retired military personnel, and people connected with the present military. I think we have a duty to express such views today, as many Members have.

The danger today was first that we would be subject to a distraction, and secondly that we would be subject to caricatures. The distraction would have been a discussion of the nature of Saddam Hussein's regime. We do not need to discuss how appalling Saddam Hussein's regime is; we know that from past evidence. We did not need the dossier to tell us. We are convinced, and there is no dissent in the Chamber.

As for the caricatures, some portray those with doubts about military action as either wishing to support the Iraqi regime or being engaged in a pacifism that does not take account of circumstances. I think a great deal of respect is owed to those who have deeply pacifist views, but many, myself included, do not have such views, and are quite prepared to see British military forces used in the right circumstances. We would argue, however, that these are not the right circumstances.

Another caricature is the suggestion that those opposed to military action are engaging in a crude anti-Americanism. I reject that caricature, but I reject equally the caricature suggesting that the Prime Minister is engaged in this process simply because he wishes to curry favour with the Administration in the White House. I think that those who heard the Prime Minister's statement today accept that he sincerely believes that there is a threat to British interests, and wants to address it. I am prepared to accept that at face value, and to accept that his discussions with the US Administration may have had a beneficial effect, but I find it hard to accept that we should offer a blank cheque, before any negotiations, saying that we will support any American position unconditionally. That supine position is unworthy of any politician or party in this country. When parties' policies change with a change of policy in America, we have to ask whether the British interest is being properly taken into account.

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There are dissenting voices in America, too. I was there on holiday a few weeks ago and I heard a vigorous debate going on. I heard real doubts expressed not only by Democrats but by leading Republicans about the wisdom of the course that the Administration were taking. Doubts were being expressed even within the Administration, and I think that those are at the core of President Bush's renewed attempts to seek United Nations approval.

We must ask not whether we support an action through the United Nations to remove weapons of mass destruction from the Iraqi arsenal but what happens next, if the action fails. What concerns many hon. Members and our constituents is that we hear warlike noises and an apparent unilateralism from across the Atlantic, seeming to signal a determination to take action irrespective of the views of the United Nations and the actions that may be taken by the Security Council and the inspection regime that we want. We hear a doctrine of pre-emptive strikes, and many of us find it hard to equate that with international legality and a coalition for action.

The Prime Minister's statement made no mention of the United States, which is odd, given that there cannot be any lack of understanding of the central role that the US plays, and we have had no analysis of the future intentions of the American Administration or of our priorities as we, quite rightly, to use the cant phrase, stand shoulder to shoulder with the US in fighting terrorism. Those of us who were in Washington on 11 September last year can certainly identify with the feelings of the American public, but we do not understand why the priorities should have changed.

We have had no analysis of the military consequences of any conflict. I have no doubt that the military strength of the US and the UK can defeat Saddam's forces, although not without difficulty—there are certainly logistical difficulties along the way. The Prime Minister said:

"there is no way that this man, in this region above all regions, could begin a conflict using such weapons and the consequences not engulf the whole world."

I accept that view, but what does it matter who starts the conflict? If that is the situation, where is the analysis of the consequences for the region and the world? He made no analysis of the effects on the Kurdish population and the knock-on effects on Turkey, or the effects on the Shi'ite population or Iran, not to mention the wider Muslim world and the potential increase in extremism and terrorism in central Asia, for instance—in Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, perhaps. Do we want to create new Afghanistans, harbouring more terrorists?

Setting aside any consideration of the benefits of legality, it is in British and American interests to work within international law. The argument for taking preventive action alone is the argument of the vigilante. We reject that in domestic law, and we should do the same internationally. We cannot take the law into our own hands. The President of the United States is not the law west of the Pecos.

Everything that we do in the House, in the Government or in our diplomatic relations with others should be based on the overwhelming principle that we must take an international legal view that encompasses the United Nations, exerting the greatest pressure possible to persuade the Iraqi Government to conform. Any action must be within that compass, but the Prime Minister has not persuaded me or, I suspect, many of our colleagues that he is necessarily committed to pursuing that line in the coming months.

6.46 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Like one or two other Labour Members, I am strangely in agreement with sentiments expressed by the hon. Members for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) and for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). I find more resonance in what they said than in the Prime Minister's statement or the Foreign Secretary's speech.

I certainly did not understand the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who seemed to be saying that it was the rest of the world that was out of step with the United Nations, and that we should get in step with the United States because that is the realpolitik of the world today. I remind him that it was not the rest of the world that stopped making its contributions to the UN or that set out to scupper the UN and its agencies. It certainly was not the leader of the rest of the world, whoever that may be—although perhaps that, too, is George Bush twice over—who went to the UN and said that it should back him in what he wanted to do, or he would do it anyway. That is the rub.

I have listened carefully to what has been said today, and of course I read the dossier. I share the reservations expressed by Government and Opposition Members about that. I do not think that it adds anything to the sum total of our knowledge of what a nasty regime there is in Iraq and what a nasty man Saddam Hussein is. I wonder about the timing of the document, and why it came into being at all. As I recall, it was promised in lieu of the kind of debate that we are having today, and it was only because of the pressure of the House and of public opinion that we have had the document and are having this debate. Without that pressure, and similar pressure from like-minded people in the United States, I do not believe that the US would have gone to the United Nations at all.

Let me sound a note of caution about the Joint Intelligence Committee. Anyone who knows anything about these matters knows that the quid pro quo for military co-operation with the US is that it shares intelligence with us. I hazard a guess that many of the dossier's allegations are based on American-led intelligence. They may be true—I do not know—but let us remember that these are the same intelligence services that misled Congress at the outbreak of the first Gulf war, when they said that 350,000 Iraqi troops were massed on the Kuwaiti border. It was Congress, not I, that declared that it had been misled.

It was the same intelligence services that said that a chemical factory in Khartoum was manufacturing weapons of mass destruction, which has since been found not to be true. They were the ones who failed to analyse the information that they had before the dreadful events of 11 September last year.

My second point is about the confusion between the British and American Governments. Is this about eradicating weapons of mass destruction or regime change? I distinctly heard the Foreign Secretary emphasise that the objective was to eradicate weapons of mass destruction. Before we place too much faith in Hans

Blix, let us remember that in April this year, Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defence, ordered a CIA investigation into Hans Blix, presumably because it was felt that he could not be relied upon to deliver the goods.

If this is not about eradicating the weapons of mass destruction, it is about regime change. Senior members of the US Administration have a long record of advocating this. On 26 January 1998, a letter was written to President Clinton which said:

"In the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power. That now needs to become the aim of American foreign policy."

I am sure that many lunatics write to Presidents, as they do to Prime Ministers. However, the signatories included Donald Rumsfeld, now Defence Secretary, the aforementioned Paul Wolfowitz, now Deputy Secretary of Defence, and John Bolton, Richard Perle and Richard Armitage, all luminaries of the current US Administration. We know exactly what their objective is.

It is certainly true that on that dreadful day of 11 September, it was reported in the American media that a meeting was held by the Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, at 2.40 that afternoon, at which he allegedly ordered his staff to see whether there was good enough information to hit Saddam Hussein. They were already considering applying a long-standing agenda about regime change. If right hon. and hon. Members want any further confirmation, they need only cast their mind back to the BBC's blanket coverage on the night of 11 September when Richard Perle, chairman of the Defence Policy Board in the Pentagon, trotted out the regimes that had to be removed.

In this debate, we must contextualise what is going on. There is no doubt in my mind that the US Administration have set themselves certain strategic targets. They have effected a change to their national security policy in which pre-emption, not deterrence, is the order of the day. They have revisited their nuclear policy so that they can use tactical and strategic nuclear weapons in a pre-emptive way but also against non-nuclear powers. They have also adopted a military strategy—joint vision 20:20—that states quite explicitly that their aim is full-spectrum dominance in air, sea, land, space and information.

There is no secret about this; it has been discussed in right-wing circles in the USA for many years. It has been adopted by the Administration—that is their right as an Administration, whether we like it and approve of it or not. We must decide whether the path that we are taking best serves the interests of this country and best reflects public opinion and, more important, fears about the direction in which the US Administration are taking America.

I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) and others that we make a distinction between the Administration and the people of America. I receive a huge number of e-mails from concerned people in America and they go right across the spectrum. They are as concerned as we are, but their national situation is different, as is the way that their media operate.

My particular concern is that if we are not careful and it is Iraq today, I am sure that it will be Iran tomorrow and Syria the day after. I am sure that Donald Rumsfeld's prediction last year that China is the ultimate enemy will come to pass. I hate to say it, but we have a group of people in key positions driving an Administration who, in my view, are almost paranoid. I describe these cold war warriors not as hawks but as pterodactyls because they mix views of a dim and distant past with the new technologies and realpolitik of the 21st century.

We must be very careful about understanding where we might go. I hope to goodness that we do not go in that direction; I hope that the attempts at diplomacy are successful. However, we must be careful not to tie ourselves to a strategy that most people do not begin to understand, much less appreciate, once they know about it.

6.55 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am delighted to catch your eye in this important debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). He is one of the true independent voices in the House and speaks a great deal of common sense.

I am grateful to the Prime Minister for, rather belatedly, acceding to the request of my right hon. and hon. Friends to hold a debate on this important subject. He should have published the dossier before 8 o'clock this morning to allow right hon. and hon. Members time in which to digest it prior to the debate. I hope that the House will be immediately recalled to debate any future developments. The number of people here shows how important the debate is.

I have had scores of letters from constituents on this subject. People are very concerned about the prospect of going to war with Saddam Hussein. They are right to be so because the basis and the evidence need to be absolutely clear before we take such a step.

There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein is one of the most evil dictators the world has ever seen. We know that more than 1 million people were killed in the Iran-Iraq war. We know that he launched mustard gas attacks against Iran and against his own people. In the Gulf war not only did he annex Kuwait but he launched Scud missiles against Israel and Saudi Arabia. We know that his is an extremely evil regime. However, those who really suffer are the people of Iraq. Those 22 million people live in a country that has the world's second largest proven oil reserves, yet in 1996 they had a gross domestic product income per head of just under $600.

Iraq has a highly educated middle class. Some 54 per cent. of people in the urban population are middle class and educated, yet they still have an appalling standard of living. In the 1990s, the number of child deaths from water pollution either doubled or trebled, according to which source one believes.

This is an evil regime, yet we must deal with it properly, otherwise we will not take the world coalition of front-line Arab and other states with us. We had that coalition in the Gulf war; it is essential to maintain it again, whatever action we take against Saddam Hussein.

This is a very important debate. It comes at a time when the United Nations is deciding what sort of resolution it might draw up and pass. People seem to have forgotten the history of the matter. In 1998, UNSCOM, the weapons inspectors, finally had to leave Iraq. Britain and the United States have tried repeatedly to get strong

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

resolutions so that they could go back but they have been thwarted by other nations on the Security Council. I hope that this debate will form part of the process so that we can get a strong and clear renewed UN mandate. That mandate must set clear goals and a clear timetable. That must be followed, if there is still non-compliance by Saddam Hussein, by a proper ultimatum. Only then should we consider committing our troops and forces to war.

Using the royal prerogative and committing troops to war is one of the most serious things that any Prime Minister can do. The right hon. Gentleman needs the support and backing of this Parliament. That is why I urge him to recall Parliament quickly in all future developments.

It is essential to consider what sort of regime could come after any action is taken against Saddam Hussein. Surely, before we go to war, the ultimate aim must be to get the weapons inspectors back. I do not believe that the dossier published this morning contains much new evidence that is not known by the international community. Let us get the weapons inspectors back into Iraq, backed up by force if necessary. If they have unfettered and unhindered access to the whole of Iraq, including the presidential palaces, we will know for certain what facilities Iraq has. If Saddam Hussein does not comply with a tough UN resolution, we must back it up by force, but I hope that we are some way off that yet.

We need to consider the effect of any action on what might come afterwards. It did not happen in the Gulf war, but it might be that if Saddam Hussein and his regime were no longer in power, the fragile coalition that exists there might break up. If Iraq breaks up, stability in the region could be in serious jeopardy. The old doctrine used to be that Iraq and Iran should be roughly equal. We are postulating taking action against Iraq, which might have nuclear capability, but we know for certain that its neighbour, Iran, does have such capability.

We must also be careful about stability in the region because of Islamic fundamentalism within Arab countries and within countries that have large Arab populations, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. We do not wish to inflame Arab temperaments by taking action that is pejorative. That is why we need UN resolutions.

If we take action against Saddam Hussein, we will be calling for restraint from the Israelis, particularly the Israeli Prime Minister. They behaved with great restraint during the Gulf war when Scud missiles were being launched at them and I appeal to them, as will the international community, to show the same restraint if we have to take action against Saddam Hussein.

We need to look at what will happen to international oil supplies. I have already said that Iraq has the world's second largest proven oil reserves, but it is not just Iraq's potential 3.5 billion barrels a day that must concern us, but the production of oil in the entire middle east. We must take steps to minimise any disruption to oil supplies to the west. We all know that the three-day war in 1973 was followed by a huge period of inflation.

I will not use up all my allotted time because I know that many others wish to speak. This is an important debate and is a possible precursor to our country going to war. I ask the House to consider the most important question, which is whether action is more risky than inaction. I suggest that since 11 September last year terrorism has become a permanent fixture on the world stage and that international norms of behaviour will never be the same again. It is better to act with consensus and diplomacy and within the rule of law than to take pre-emptive action. If we take pre-emptive action, who knows whether other countries might think that it is right for them to do the same?

7.3 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I want to make only one main point. This has been a useful debate, but we all know that we will be back here again in a few weeks. There will be a crunch time when the United Nations tries to put together a resolution that will be acceptable to the middle east countries and to other members of the Security Council. If we do not get that resolution, we will be back here to decide how to respond. If we do get that resolution, we will be back here either to accept the inspector's report showing that certain things have been found and certain things have been done and that it is acceptable to the Security Council or because the inspectors have been obstructed or have found things to which the Iraqi Government are not prepared to respond. The United Nations and the British Government would then have to decide what to do.

I have read the document published by the Government this morning but it does not take us much further along the road. Presumably, its contents are the intelligence community's best belief about the situation in Iraq. I do not know whether that is so, but when the public here and in other countries are deciding whether they believe what is being said by our Government, they will not be persuaded by what the Joint Intelligence Committee has said. I am not saying that the committee is wrong, just that the public will not be persuaded.

I believe that people will be persuaded—certainly those in my constituency who have been lobbying me—only if there is a just cause that must be addressed by the international community. When people are making up their minds about whether there is a just cause, they will ask themselves whether the United Nations backs what has been suggested. Any diplomatic and political strategy should be carried out through the United Nations, and I am glad that our Government are committed to taking forward the strategy in that way.

The Government must also say that, if we get into difficulties with diplomacy and need to take things further, it will also be done through the United Nations. It would be extremely dangerous for Britain and America to go ahead on their own with some military adventure in Iraq. It would cause more problems than it would solve. There is no doubt that Britain and America have the military power to destroy whatever they want to destroy in Iraq, but what happens afterwards? If we do not start with a coalition of public support, it will be impossible to build any stable society in Iraq and neighbouring countries afterwards.

I was in the middle east about 10 days ago and I spoke to many people in both the political and commercial sectors. They all believed that, ultimately, it was about oil and that that was why there was such focus from the international community. They also believed that without

an international coalition, the instability caused by any action would cause huge problems for oil supplies. I do not believe that the Government will have public support unless there is a coalition through the UN from the beginning.

We cannot get such a coalition without persuading Iraq's neighbours that they must support whatever action is being proposed. It is not good enough for the dossier simply to say that there is a problem. The people in the neighbouring countries have to believe that there is a problem and want the support of the international community, just as the Kuwaiti community did during the Gulf war. We must not ignore that issue.

I do not want to say any more other than that it would be wrong for our nation and Government to enter into action in Iraq, either political or military, without international support. Any action must be through the United Nations and there must be support from other members of the Security Council and other Arab and Islamic states in the region that might be threatened.

7.9 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I should like to say a few words about Iraq, the threat of terrorism and descriptions of a new world order that are now being articulated to justify military action.

On Iraq, my reservations have already been voiced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). I will not rehearse those arguments again. Like them, I am not convinced by the evidence so far provided that Saddam has the capability and the intention to attack the west. I think that the biggest single risk from current developments is that if we engage in military action and Saddam is cornered, he may attack Israel and provoke it to the point of triggering a general middle east conflagration.

It is, of course, right that the UN should try to resolve the crisis through a resumption of weapons inspections. However, I differ from my colleagues in one important respect. In a crisis such as this, so much depends on intelligence information, which, except in general terms, Prime Ministers cannot share with us. Only the Prime Minister can judge the scale of this threat. He says that he is convinced that it is very serious and very real. Ultimately, I will have to trust his reasons for forming that judgment, but in the coming weeks I hope that he will go far further than he has so far today in explaining the need for war.

The crisis now developing has its roots in the terrorist atrocity of 9/11. Britain can make a significant contribution to reducing the risk of further terrorist threats. The most important thing that we can do is to get the Americans to grasp the full implications of the fact that terrorism cannot be overcome solely by military means. They must grasp that the level of anti-western terrorism from the Islamic world will be determined partly by the battle for the hearts and minds of moderate Muslim opinion, and that must mean addressing the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

The Prime Minister has implied, and briefed the press, that he has a lot of influence behind the scenes with the United States. Publicly, he backs almost everything that the Americans say. If he really has a unique and special relationship with President Bush, the acid test must surely be whether the Prime Minister can persuade him to moderate Israeli military action in Palestine. That is not only morally right, but it is in the security interests of Britain and the west. It would do more to reduce the threat of Islamic terrorism in the west than any number of military operations.

Mrs. Ellman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyrie: No. If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I have only 10 minutes to make my speech.

Let me say a few words about the rhetoric of new world orders that has been put around recently. Over the past year, the Prime Minister has made speeches calling for a new world order in which the west should be justified in intervening to prevent abuses of human rights. However, there is a gap between that rhetoric and the hard reality of the campaign against terrorism. If we are to tackle terrorism, we must be prepared to accept that we will have to do business with many countries whose human rights records make us feel uncomfortable to say the least. The list includes Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Malaysia, China and Egypt. We have been dealing with all those countries to try to break down the al-Qaeda network. We do so because they have repudiated terrorism even though their human rights records are awful. That is the contradiction at the heart of the Prime Minister's new order. His attempt today to justify action against Saddam partly on the ground of human rights abuses in Iraq is at best disingenuous. We are not launching a humanitarian expedition.

Some of the rhetoric coming from the Bush Administration is even more worrying. The Prime Minister will discover that his new world order is very different from that espoused by the American President. The Prime Minister's new world order is internationalist and based on human rights; America's is unilateralist and designed to facilitate the expression of US power. It is underpinned by two new doctrines. The first is the doctrine of regime change: the removal by force, if necessary, of the leaders of rogue states. The second is the doctrine of pre-emptive military action: the view that in the case of rogue and failed states, military action may be taken even in the absence of a clear and imminent threat from those countries to America's interests.

Those doctrines are inherently destabilising of international relations. The notion that pre-emptive action may be taken without clear evidence of an imminent attack undermines the most basic principle of the relations between states—that military action can be justified only by self-defence. The doctrine of regime change is equally corrosive. Who should decide when a country's leadership should be changed?

Those doctrines could all too easily be used by other countries to justify their actions and secure their objectives. Vladimir Putin has already articulated President Bush's rhetoric in a speech to justify recent bombing in Georgia. Such arguments will not be lost on the Chinese or Prime Minister Sharon, among others.

America and the west will not be able to prevent that. Preponderant though the US is, she is not strong enough to impose her will on the whole world: she must seek allies and balance forces, as all previous superpowers have done, and do that within the existing system of states.

[Mr. Tyrie]

The stability of the international system has at its core a mutual recognition of the legitimacy of other states to exist, to secure their frontiers and to maintain law and order. I am not making a narrow point about international law, nor do I think that no action can ever be taken unless the UN sanctions it. I believe that it is simply a common-sense principle. It is what the US was building on when Truman and Acheson developed the doctrine of containment after the second world war as a means of managing Soviet expansionism. It was Henry Kissinger's achievement, through detente, to engage with the Soviet Union to the point where the Soviet Union had a greater interest in recognising the rights of other states to exist than it did in seeking to undermine them.

The multilateralism of the US in the post-war era has done the world a huge service, not only by keeping the peace, but by providing the necessary stability to enable European recovery and lay the foundations for western prosperity. We owe the Americans a great debt, but those parts of the US policy-making machine that now want to create a new international order need to know—and to be told by our Government—that they are shaking that system to its foundations.

If an attack on Iraq is justified on the grounds of the new doctrines of regime change and pre-emptive action, there is far more at stake than the uncertainty that inevitably comes with large-scale military action, the possible disintegration of Iraq or even the destabilisation of the whole middle east. If action is justified by the doctrine of regime change and pre-emptive action, the overthrow of Saddam will provide many states with the opportunity to take action using the same rhetoric in breach of the traditional restraints on the use of force. It will cut at the roots of international order and in the long run it will make us less secure, not more secure.

The greatest contribution that the Prime Minister can make now is not just to drop some of his own rhetoric about a new international order, but to persuade George Bush of the dangers of his own.

7.17 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Earlier today, the Prime Minister gave us a powerful description of the nature of the regime in Iraq. Nobody on either side of the debate or on either side of the House has disagreed with it. Partly because of that description, I wonder why the call by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) for a proper indictment of Saddam Hussein has not been taken up with greater vigour.

I also think that the emphasis that my hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary placed on the context in which they may be considering military action made some sense although I have some questions. It was couched very much in terms of maintaining pressure on Saddam in order to avoid that action. However, I have great difficulty reconciling what was said in the Chamber today about using threats to pressure Saddam with the messages that have been coming rather more consistently from the White House and the United States. They do not appear to be arguing that if international law and UN resolutions are to be obeyed, it is not enough to exhort and set processes in train and that it is necessary to ensure that there is the will and the ability to enforce them. Rather, the message is that a conclusion has already been reached and that the procedures of arguing the case in the United Nations and winning international support are stages on the way to reaching that conclusion rather than means of avoiding that conclusion and trying to ensure a peaceful resolution to the problem that we face. That is worrying and profoundly troubling. If we are to play a role in international affairs which maximises our leverage and influence over the United States, we need to draw out some of those distinctions, say that the conclusions have not yet been reached and act accordingly.

Although it is to be welcomed that President Bush went to the United Nations, I find it troubling that that was rapidly followed by an enunciation of the new doctrines to which many hon. Members have already referred: the doctrines in the US national security strategy of pre-emptive strikes. The United States appears to take to itself the power and the responsibility of acting as some kind of global emperor—of deciding which states and actions are legitimate, which states and regimes may remain in place and which will not be allowed to remain. As many hon. Members have said, that is not only profoundly destabilising of the reality of international politics, but undermines the very principles on which the United Nations was based. There can be no shortcuts round the United Nations. No state can set itself above the United Nations as the arbiter of international affairs.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) said, if the United States and perhaps Britain launched military action against Iraq in support of those doctrines, it is true that in the short term and the narrow military sense a victory could be secured. But we must ask what the consequences of that would be for the region and the wider world. I have travelled to the middle east many times and the allegation there from both the Governments and the people in the street is of double standards. Their perception is that somehow international law and United Nations resolutions are more precious in one part of the world than they are in another.

I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have sponsored a new United Nations resolution on the middle east and I welcome their support for a new initiative to get the peace process going. If for Iraq we say that it is not enough to exhort and set processes in train and that we must ensure that the will of the United Nations and of the international community is upheld, that applies equally to Israel. We need to say that.

Mrs. Ellman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Richard Burden: No, I have not got time. There is only 10 minutes for my speech. The intervention was perhaps predictable.

If we are to overcome those allegations of double standards, we have to demonstrate by our actions that we do not take that approach. We must put ourselves in the position of a refugee in Gaza who is not allowed to go from one part of Gaza to another because it has been closed off, and whose home may have been destroyed by an Israeli aircraft supplied by the United States and perhaps with components made here in Great Britain. It is not enough to say to that person, "There is a difference because for your situation the UN resolution is covered by chapter 6 rather than chapter 7." The reality is the

same. We must show by our actions that we are serious about those matters. We must show that simply exhortation and setting processes in train is no more sufficient for the middle east crisis than it is for Iraq.

I say that not just from the point of view of justice; I say it because it is vital for our credibility in making any challenges to the threats posed by Saddam Hussein. In the Gulf war in the early 1990s Saddam responded entirely predictably. He is no friend of the Palestinians, but he poses as one. He launched Scud missiles against Israel. Fortunately, Israel did not respond. Do we honestly think that Saddam Hussein would behave differently this time? I do not think so. There may be a key difference in that there is a different kind of Government in Israel. In the aftermath of 11 September Sharon described Arafat as Israel's bin Laden. We know that to be nonsense. Would it not appeal to a hawk like Sharon to try to get those issues mixed up once again and to say that his actions against the Palestinians and his refusal to abide by the obligations of UN resolutions 242 and 338 were somehow about confronting any threat posed by Saddam? Would there not be a temptation for Israel either to respond to attacks from Iraq or even to launch a pre-emptive strike of its own? If we got into that spiral, the consequences for the region and the wider world would be dangerous.

It is right to take this issue seriously. It is right that we meet the threat posed by Saddam's nuclear weapons programme and his acquisition of other weapons of mass destruction. But we need to be absolutely clear that that can be done only in the context of international law. The instrument that we have fashioned to uphold international law is the United Nations and there can be no shortcuts or ways round it. If we are to ensure that that instrument can be fashioned to deal with Saddam and Iraq, we have to show by our actions, and America must accept, that international law and United Nations resolutions are indivisible. They are as important in their application to the Palestinian in Gaza as in dealing with the threat posed by Saddam.

7.27 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby):

"In war, whichever side may call itself the victor, there are no winners, but all are losers."

As some Members may know, that is a quote from Neville Chamberlain in July 1938. While history has not been kind to him, it would be astonishing if we did not all sympathise, although perhaps not agree, with those sentiments.

As we discuss war or military action tonight we should remember how ghastly it is. There is always death and every soldier, British, Iraqi, Serb or Afghan, is some mother's son. Nobody who has seen war will relish seeing it again. Chamberlain's sentiments were based on experiences of the first world war.

War may be the lesser of two evils. If Saddam Hussein would comply completely with all UN resolutions, there would be no need for this debate or, for any military action and certainly no need for war. I come to this debate with a slightly different perspective. Excellent speeches have been made, but I should like to discuss the issue from my minor experiences of the Gulf war in 1991 when I rejoined as the chief of staff of the prisoner-of-war guard force in Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. It is only limited experience, but I saw something from ground level.

First, the Iraqi army—we captured some 8,000 prisoners of war—was not well motivated. Almost as soon as British troops appeared morale collapsed and they surrendered. I am not suggesting that we should be complacent about any Iraqi troops now, but we should know that there was no morale and no motivation. The soldiers were not well equipped. Far from it. Most of their tanks were T55s built in 1955. They were all Soviet tanks and by 1991 Soviet tanks had progressed to T82s, as I recall. It was old, obsolete equipment. Their kit was dreadful.

In field hospitals I saw soldiers that we were treating who had been shot by their own side when they tried to surrender, because that was how they made people serve. We saved many Iraqis from starvation, from dehydration and from dying of cold. The first Iraqis that I encountered on the first day of the war were all very swarthy, dressed in British NBC—nuclear, biological and chemical protection kit. I wondered why they were all dressed like that. The answer was that they were dying of exposure and we saved them. We put in a special Chinook helicopter filled with water, because we took so many prisoners who were dying of thirst because their side had not tried, or not been able, to feed or water them.

When these conscripts saw that they were not in danger, and that they were in a prisoner-of-war camp being well treated and fed, it became like a school outing because they were so happy. Imagine British soldiers with bayonets fixed—18-year-old boys wondering what to do when these unarmed Iraqis would crawl under the fences between the cages to get a second meal. They did not want to shoot or bayonet them, so in the end the Iraqis just got two meals. They were very happy to be under our protection; there was no question about that.

The prisoners were not in any way pro Saddam Hussein. Some of them had literally been rounded up in the fields or in factories. They had been taken away and press ganged; that is well documented from the Iran-Iraq war. They were certainly not in favour of the war and, like all conscripts, they wanted to go home to their families. They wanted peace. They were terrified of informers—Iraq was a police state then as it is now—but I spoke to many in private who were willing to say how desperately they wanted to get rid of the Saddam Hussein regime. That was not true of the Republican Guard—they were a different matter—but it must be said that they also surrendered when they were confronted by superior force.

The huge majority of these people wanted the end of Saddam Hussein and we let them down. I was told that many, when they were finally taken back some six months later by the Iraqi regime, were murdered or imprisoned by the regime.

A lot of nonsense is talked about the end of the war in 1991—about how we could not go on and occupy Baghdad. All that we had to do was fight on for about another two days. It was not easy; we were coming to the end of our supply chain and lines of communication were very stretched, but if we had moved on at the same pace for another two days we would have cut off the bulk of the Republican Guard, who were north-east of Basra, and if we had done so we would have cut off Saddam Hussein's support.

I hear people say that we had to stop the war because of the coalition. It seemed to me that all members of the coalition were astonished that we stopped, and indeed the

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

Arab leaders were very distressed that we had not deposed their enemy, Saddam Hussein. We read self-justification in the papers now, but I remember being told, when I was woken in my basha on the Iraqi sand, that there was a ceasefire coming, which would be exactly 100 hours after the invasion started, because they wanted a 100-hour war. That decision was taken by George Bush Sr. There was no consultation. Douglas Hurd—he can correct me if I am wrong—now Lord Hurd, who was Foreign Secretary, was in Washington DC and he was not consulted. I remember seeing James Baker, then the Secretary of State, standing on the steps of the White House saying, "We have taught Saddam Hussein a lesson." I believe that he misjudged the situation terribly. Now, 11 and a half years on, Saddam Hussein is still a bloody tyrant who terrorises his own people.

I will not dwell on the million people killed in the Iran-Iraq war, or the fact that 600-odd Kuwaiti prisoners of war and deportees who were taken to Iraq have still not been accounted for. Although I will not dwell on it, we should remember that the Iraqis set light to all those oil wells, creating ghastly pollution in the Persian gulf in 1991, and that Saddam killed 5,000 people in Halabja. I will mention the fact that Saddam butchered his own sons-in-law in 1996, having given them a guarantee of safety, and that he has butchered thousands of others. Since 1991, he has defied endless UN resolutions.

Saddam has been compared to Hitler, which people say is completely inappropriate, but I do not think that it is. It is much more appropriate than comparing the foreign policy of George Bush to that of Hitler. I do not believe that Saddam's brutality and his actions against Iraqis are enough to force a war because, with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), I do not believe that it is our right to impose regime change on Iraq—although I think that it may occur.

However, Saddam Hussein continues to work to threaten us, and we see that in the dossier. Nothing much in it is new, but it does show that he has the intent to threaten other people. He is a threat to his own poor people and, I believe, a threat to the peace of the world, the region and the middle east. Those who dismiss that assertion should judge him by his past actions.

Saddam launched Scuds against Israel in 1991. Would he launch a nuclear missile against Israel now if he had one? I do not know, but I think that it is a possibility because, as people have identified, it would bring all the Arabs to his side. Perhaps he might.

We should have learned from the experience of the past 12 years, or indeed the 23 years that Saddam has been in power, that we cannot trust him. We cannot negotiate with him. We cannot ride this crocodile.

War is never easy and always ghastly. We have heard some navel-gazing from the Liberal Democrats in particular, asking, "What if this? What if that?" It is very fair that these questions should be asked, but could the result of, for example, Iraq's breaking up be worse for the Iraqi Kurds or the Iraqi Marsh Arabs or the Shi'ites than it is now? They have lived a ghastly life under this regime. If the Iraqi Kurds want self-determination, is not that to a very large extent up to them? It seems to me that it should be, within the United Nations.

Saddam Hussein has flouted the United Nations for well over 12 years. He is certainly a threat to his old enemies, such as Iran, and perhaps also Saudi Arabia. I think that he is a threat to us in the United Kingdom and the United States, who are also his old enemies. However, the legal position, which has been addressed, is very important. United Nations resolutions are very important. We should remember that Saddam Hussein has no legitimacy himself. He got there by force; he keeps himself there by force. He oppresses, tortures and executes his people. The greatest beneficiaries if, God forbid, we should have to go to war, of his defeat and—I believe it should be an object also—his subsequent removal from power would be the poor, oppressed, benighted people of Iraq.

7.36 pm

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I thank my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary for so clearly stating today the case for the rule of international law, the return of the UN weapons inspectors and the necessity of destroying the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

I too believe that doing nothing is not an option. But as the Prime Minister said today, we have not been doing nothing. Our right hon. Friends have said that the policy of containment has not worked. Well, perhaps not. But we need to ask, could we have done more and differently? Could the threat of war have been avoided, and can actual war now be averted? I believe that the answer to all three questions is yes.

Last year my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke movingly of a new world order—the primacy of multilateral agreements, not just in tackling terrorism but in poverty alleviation, development and reconstruction. Since that time, by contrast with the exemplary behaviour of our own Government, the United States has opted out of effective multilateral co-operation and developed an increasingly unilateralist and pre-emptive military stance. Furthermore, I believe that President Bush has sought to use international support for the war against terrorism to justify regime change in Iraq. That connection deserves examination.

A year ago, the United Kingdom was committed to military action against al-Qaeda. I supported that action, as I did the military action in the Gulf. I accepted the justification of self-defence under international law, but I do not believe that at present we have the same justification of self-defence in respect of the Iraqi regime. I do believe that the risks involved in war against Iraq are greater than the risks of pursuing the alternative strategy of diplomacy and UN inspections, and I do not underestimate how difficult, time-consuming and frustrating that will be.

I have just returned from a conference in Egypt, hosted by the first lady, Suzanne Mubarak. Immediately before that I was in Afghanistan. I believe that both experiences are relevant to today's debate.

The year-long war against terrorism in Afghanistan has been waged by 10,000 combat and support troops but, despite the disruption of the al-Qaeda operation in that country, very few al-Qaeda militia have been captured and US intelligence believes that their leadership largely remains intact. It is commonly acknowledged that al-Qaeda's threat to the west derives from its primary aim

of replacing the house of Saud, establishing an Islamist state and ridding Saudi Arabia and the middle east of American bases and influence. Nothing, I suggest, could provide al-Qaeda with more ready recruits and the pretext for further attacks on the west than Saudi support for a US strike on Baghdad.

Even more of a paradox in the prosecution of this war against terrorism is the deterioration in the security situation in Israel and the occupied territories. Despite the constant cycle of violence, the suicide bombings, assassinations, detention, punishments and the horrific events of the past few days, the US Administration continues to arm and support Israel unconditionally. So where is the justice? Where is the security? Where is the new world order?

We have to ask ourselves whether a military attack on Iraq would enhance or undermine justice and security in the middle east and whether a military attack would increase or decrease the threat of terrorist attack against the west. I believe that such a war risks huge loss of life, massive environmental damage and the possible destabilisation of the very states in the middle east that the US says it seeks to protect from Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. Surely a strategy of regime change by military means, as other hon. Members have said today, risks Saddam using the very weapons of mass destruction that we so fear.

During the past few days in Egypt, I have talked extensively to women from a number of Arab states. Without exception, they are opposed to the Iraqi regime and, without exception, they are opposed to military action. Each confessed to being afraid—afraid for their own countries, for their economies and for their environments, and deeply angry at the prospect of the Iraqi people having to suffer more pain. Being there in Egypt gave me a profound sense of being one of them, looking at us and wondering how we could contemplate such a war—a feeling which is further reinforced by talking to women from the United Nations, who are quietly preparing the camps, transport and food sources for the anticipated humanitarian crisis.

That brings me to Afghanistan. I was there on 11 September. Just before I arrived, 25 people had been killed in the street and President Karzai had just escaped an assassination attempt. I went to see how the international community was fulfilling its promises to the Afghan people, and I saw much that was very positive. I was proud of the role that the UK Government have played and are playing in support of reconstruction, but in the context of Iraq and the new world order, we should consider not what has been achieved since regime change, but what remains to be done.

The transitional Government are vulnerable, with a serious ethnic imbalance. There is as yet no trained police force and no army loyal to the central Government. Nearly 2 million refugees have returned to Kabul, yet not a single home has been built by the transitional authority. All calls for an extension of ISAF have failed to get results, and warlords continue to rampage through the rest of the country. Many of the financial promises made in Tokyo have yet to materialise, and the World Food Programme has just put out an appeal for funds because it does not have the money to buy the wheat for the essential winter feeding programmes.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister rightly reminded the House today that the international community made a solemn promise not to walk away. I have no doubt about his sincerity, but I tell the House that in Afghanistan people believe that the United States is about to move on. We cannot make promises to the people of Iraq unless we are absolutely certain that we will honour those that we have already made elsewhere.

In conclusion, I urge my right hon. Friends to continue vigorously to pursue their efforts to secure the peaceful re-entry of the UN inspectors, to build more effective alliances in the region and to reinvigorate the middle east peace process. Only with greater justice do I believe that war can be avoided and that the goal that unites us all—the destruction of the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction—can be realised.

7.44 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): The decision to go to war is not one taken lightly by any democratic Government. I believe that the job of a Member of Parliament is often to question that decision, preferably before British troops have been committed. Neither I nor, as I know from today's debate, anyone else in the Chamber has any sympathy with Saddam Hussein or with the excesses of Islamic fundamentalism, or any other kind of fundamentalist or oppressive dictator for that matter. I do not believe that responsible nations should stand idly by while others suffer or die from oppression, invasion or hunger.

I will be the first to support, albeit reluctantly, the pursuit of evil dictators who pose a threat to my own people and to others who should otherwise live in freedom, but I will not blindly concur with decisions to commit the lives of British service men and women, unless I am convinced of both the justice and the sense of that action.

The United States seems determined to force a regime change on the people of Iraq, and we all know, given the current state of Iraqi politics, that that cannot happen democratically. We all know that the devastation of the Gulf war, the imposition of no-fly zones, the economic sanctions and the general hatred of Saddam have done nothing to weaken his regime.

The Iraqi regime has a record of human rights abuse and genocide that would be defended by no one. Its record is, however, by no means unique; other nations in history have perpetrated equally indefensible acts that have gone unchecked.

The real question now is about Saddam Hussein's current capabilities and his future intentions. The question is not just whether Saddam Hussein has chemical, biological and nuclear technology, for that is all in the dossier that we saw this morning, but whether he has the weapons, the delivery mechanism and, most importantly, the intention of using that capability in an aggressive manner. If I were particularly inward-looking, I could further ask: if he has all that, is he likely to use it against Britain or British interests?

As an elected representative of the British people, the question that I ask our Government is simple: does Saddam Hussein present such a threat that I should be prepared to sanction and support military action that would lead to the loss of British service men and women? Such action would also lead to the deaths of many

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hundreds of innocent Iraqi men, women and children. Such action might lead to the destabilisation of the near and middle east, including ethnic conflict in our NATO ally, Turkey, and an escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

This is not a debate about pacifism, as was so bravely put by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), and many of his sentiments were also expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor). Nor is this a question of nimbyism. This is a simple question about political and military right.

Can George Bush convince the United Nations, including the Arab world, that Saddam Hussein has the capability and the intention to destroy the world order? Can the Prime Minister convince me and other hon. Members that that man poses a threat to Britain of such magnitude that we have to go to war?

The dossier that we saw today still has many unanswered questions in it and much speculation. Saddam's record is not in question, but as of today, he is not at war with Iran and he is not in occupation of Kuwait. There is a peace, however imperfect, which has been secured by UN resolutions, no-fly zones and economic sanctions. If we launch an attack, we will destroy that peace. We will have launched the first strike.

The second question, if the catalogue of weapons of mass destruction in the dossier is correct—I have no reason to doubt it—and if such capability can be put into action in just 45 minutes, is: what steps can we take to protect our troops, the people of Iraq and our friends in the region from that horror?

There are many other questions, but my final one in this debate is: what will the region look like after Saddam Hussein? I talk not just of Iraq, but of Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and our NATO ally Turkey—not to mention Israel and Palestine. For this is not Afghanistan; this is a much more complex ethnic and political jigsaw.

We must have an endgame before we start. If in the end I can be convinced that this crusade is justified, I will with all my might seek to convince my electors that their sons and daughters should join the crusade so that we can rid the world of this evil regime. I will do that with great reluctance—my own children could see action in that conflict—but I will do it because I believe that, once the decision is taken, we must give our wholehearted support to the thousands of British service men and women who will risk their lives for what will be the most just of causes.

7.51 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): The Prime Minister helpfully set out in his statement this morning that, first, the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq was high on his list of priorities, and secondly that for him the objective was the destruction of the weapons of mass destruction held by Iraq. Although that was very helpful, the Prime Minister's case has been massively undermined by the confusion that has arisen as a result of very senior sources in the American Administration talking consistently about regime change and very different objectives.

That voice, heard in this House and throughout Britain, has led to an extraordinary degree of cynicism about the American Administration's real objectives. I share that cynicism because I know of no way that this Government would be in a position in the end to constrain the actions of the United States Administration. The United States most certainly has the capacity to make war unilaterally and to win that war in military terms if it chooses to do so.

The most bizarre thing about the recent announcement of the new American doctrine of pre-emptive strikes and unilateralism is that it flies so much in the face of what we thought that the Americans and the world had learned when this House met just 12 months ago in the aftermath of the events of 11 September and talked of the recognition of the fact that the coalition against terrorism was not just a military one but operated at every level. It was a coalition in which the United States was a very important partner, but only a partner. I was one of those who supported military action against Afghanistan and al-Qaeda because I believed in building that coalition. At the moment, the United States is risking the destruction of that concept of coalition. Indeed, as partners in the venture, we risk such destruction too if we get it wrong.

The odd thing at the moment is that, as one of my hon. Friends said, we should be calling Saddam Hussein's bluff. We should be saying, "Look, if you accept weapons inspectors into Iraq again, we will ensure that we get them in and that existing and, indeed, new UN Security Council resolutions will be a basis for that." Like others, I call strongly for a resolution to make clear at every stage the expectations of Saddam Hussein and—this is important—of the world community, including Great Britain and the United States. It is important that there is no room for doubt over where the world goes from here.

It is important, for example, that if the weapons inspectors return to Iraq and discover default, obfuscation or deliberate attempts on the part of Saddam to prevent them from carrying out their activities, that it is reported not by politicians but by the inspectors themselves. Then it would be for the world community to make a decision. Under those circumstances, with UN support, I would support military action to enforce the UN resolutions, as at that point it would be clear that Saddam Hussein was intending to flout them. Long before that, however, we must get those inspectors into the country and call Saddam's bluff. That would give us the opportunity of a peaceful resolution.

I must say iconoclastically that no one has answered the question about what happened to the policy of deterrence. Perhaps the deterrence argument has disappeared, yet such an argument still exists and my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) made it. There is no doubt that Saddam is an evil man. He has done some horrendous things to his own people and his neighbours. I watched him over many years when Saddam-watching was not a high priority in the House, but I do not think that he is suicidal. I do not agree that he would resist the concept of deterrence if it were clear that he would meet overwhelming force from the United States and, indeed, Great Britain in the event of use of weapons of mass destruction against ourselves or his neighbours.

Although the concept of deterrence is still important, the argument has gone beyond it. We are now committed either to weapons inspectors or to war. Therefore, I must

say that the deployment of weapons inspectors is massively cheaper in global terms than the alternative of a conflict.

Various Members on both sides of the House have drawn parallels with past events, 1991, and so on. We most certainly take on board the fact that there is a fragile world opinion, especially in the Arab world, which sees itself as having been humiliated over recent years. We must consider not just what the house of Saud thinks but what is thought by 15 and 16-year-olds growing up in Saudi Arabia and by people throughout the middle east. We must disabuse ourselves of the perception that Saddam is always seen as the villain. Although he most certainly is a villain, we would be very stupid if we did not recognise that we have allowed him to paint himself as the hero of the dispossessed and of those who feel that there is no justice on this planet for them and their condition.

That brings us to the situation in the context of Israel and Palestine. I disagree with my hon. Friends who say that Iraq is only as important as Burma. That is not true. Iraq probably possesses weapons of extraordinary capacity, unlike Burma, and could threaten peace in the middle east and the world. However, the one situation that threatens that even more is that between Palestine and Israel. I ask our Government and the American Government to put just one tenth of the effort directed towards Iraq into resolving that situation. Then we could begin to transform this world and opinion in favour of action against those such as Saddam. We must say clearly to the present Government in Israel that their actions are now so far beyond any level of acceptability that they are part of the whole problem and most certainly not a separate issue that can be dealt with later.

The stakes that we are playing for are quite extraordinary. There are circumstances where, under proper UN mandate, Saddam would legitimately face military action of which Britain should be part if he continued to default on his obligations. We should certainly be part of building such a coalition around the world in the event that we find ourselves in that unhappy position, but at the moment we should be building a coalition to ensure that weapons inspectors return to Iraq, maximum diplomatic pressure is brought to bear on Saddam and that the message is conveyed to a world ready for such action that the UN, as the Prime Minister pointed out, faces a challenge. Its challenge is not to conform to United States doctrine. Quite rightly, it is under the challenge of ensuring that previous UN resolutions come to fruition. That is a challenge for us all, because those of us who believe in the UN have to see its resolutions backed. The way to do that now is to call Saddam's bluff, get the inspectors in and begin that process. If we do that, there will be huge agreement across the House and it will be possible to move forward on that agenda. The challenge to our Government is to say to the Americans that there are no circumstances under which we would now accept pre-emptive military action, because such military action would destroy the fragile balance that exists. It would not be part of making peace for the long-term future.

8 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I fear that the Government's behaviour shows that they underestimate the cynicism and detachment that affect politics in this country and the hard work that they will have to do if they are to persuade the British people to back the action that the Prime Minister proposes. This dossier makes a strong case, but it is evident from remarks made by Members on both sides of the House that it has not persuaded all of us of the justification for that action. However, it is not us but the public at large—both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere—who need to be persuaded.

The Prime Minister has not merely delayed for six weeks, as the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) suggested. The Prime Minister has delayed for six months or more. That delay has created in the eyes of many people a serious leadership gap. Six months ago in the debate on 6 March, I spoke of the need for the Government to forge a chain of trust. The failure of any link in that chain weakens our country's ability to commit our forces overseas with the wholehearted support of the British people. However, that chain of trust is being weakened by the many members of the public who do not believe that the Government are right. It has also been weakened for me and many of my hon. Friends by the regular failure of the Prime Minister and his colleagues to answer honest questions about this subject and some others fully and expeditiously.

On many occasions since 6 March, the Prime Minister has missed opportunities to reinforce the chain of trust. In March and April alone, at least six occasions arose for Ministers to prepare the British people, but on too many occasions they have restricted their remarks to formulaic statements. For example, the Prime Minister said:

> "When judgments are made, I shall ensure that the House has a full opportunity to debate them."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 23.]

That was the formula virtually throughout.

The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), was unusually specific for a Minister when he said:

> "Instead of focusing on Washington, we should be mobilising public opinion to support the UN, and uniting to apply pressure to Saddam Hussein".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 25 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 175WH.]

What is the evidence of the Government's success in meeting that ambition? The Prime Minister said in his statement earlier today that the issue of Iraq has come over his desk every week in the past year. Yet he also told us that he came back a few weeks ago and realised that he had to go out to explain the issue to people. That has been his failure. He held a conference in Sedgefield and he spoke to the TUC, but until then he had shown disregard for the British people. The Prime Minister's failure to recall the House until now has again shown his disregard not for us but for the British people whom we represent. In his failure to produce this dossier until a few hours before this debate, he showed his disregard for the British people.

Because of that disregard, the Prime Minister has yet to earn our people's support for the course of action on which he is set. That failure will have a price both at home and abroad. At home, there is great distress and great cynicism among many of our constituents. That has been shown to me by my constituents of all parties and of none. Some of them are robust—retired army officers and their wives—and they are not habitually weak kneed

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in the face of a real threat. However, they say, "Why stir up a hornet's nest in the middle east, which has nothing to do with us?" Some are cynical, and believe that the Prime Minister needs to explain the issue better than he has done so far. They have no belief in the Prime Minister or many other politicians and they use words like "poodle" and "pocket handkerchief Churchill". Some are frankly frightened. A former Labour voter came to me in tears and said, "I fear for the innocent Iraqi women and children. I fear even more for my friends in this country and especially those who live or work in London. But I am angry at my Prime Minister who places his friendship with George W. Bush above the interests of the British people." Those are the sentiments that are expressed to me and it is the Prime Minister's job to answer them.

Many people—it may be news to Labour Members—do not trust the Prime Minister. They did once and they could do so again, but he has to re-earn that trust. He needs to address the issues relating to this conflict that matter to our constituents. International law and the interpretation of UN resolutions, which have taken so much of our attention, are not high on that list of interests.

Dr. Palmer: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that he gives the impression that he is much more interested in bashing the Prime Minister than he is in the subject of the debate?

Mr. Turner: I am sorry if that is the hon. Gentleman's impression, but those are the sentiments expressed to me by people of all parties, including the Labour party, and of none. For example, people ask whether the Muslim world will see an attack on Iraq as an attack on it. Will it not see it as an extension of United States support for Israel in Palestine? What about the Muslims in this country? On 6 November, the Prime Minister declined to tell me in a written answer which Muslim organisations in this country had supported our action in Afghanistan. What about the threat to people in this country, for example, from biological weapons released in the underground?

This debate has been too much about international law and too little about domestic peace of mind. If the Prime Minister wants the British people's assent to the commitment of British troops, he has a duty to get them on his side. He has a duty to secure their peace of mind; he has a duty to fill the leadership gap. It would grieve me not to be able to support the United States—our best and truest friend as a nation—but the case has still to be made.

8.7 pm

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath): As other Members have said, the dossier that we received this morning shows conclusively that Saddam Hussein is an evil man. We already knew that. He is a brutal dictator, and he has been a brutal dictator for many years. He has used genocide and poison gas against his own people. He launched a war against Iran albeit with some support from the west, and that resulted in more than 1 million people being killed. He invaded Kuwait, and when he left he caused an environmental disaster by torching the oilfields.

I have no doubt whatever that Saddam Hussein is engaged in making chemical weapons and is seeking to acquire a nuclear capability. Based on his past behaviour, I have no doubt that he will play games with the UN weapons inspectors when they go to Iraq. The world and the people of Iraq will be well rid of him. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) said, if George Bush had allowed Desert Storm to continue for a little while longer, the allies would have been at the gates of Baghdad and Saddam Hussein might well have been deposed by now.

Andrew Selous: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Godsiff: I am sorry, but I have only a short time.

I want to make it clear that, although I fully support the United Kingdom working through the UN, I can envisage situations in which either the United Kingdom or America take unilateral action because they feel that their national interests are under threat. However, having said that, I cannot understand the political logic behind an attack on Iraq.

After the events of 9/11, the civilised world united in its determination to combat and root out international terrorism. We rightly supported action against the Taliban in Afghanistan who were harbouring the al-Qaeda organisation. However, because we were unable completely to destroy al-Qaeda at a stroke we seem to have changed our emphasis and are now considering an attack on what George Bush called part of the "axis of evil". That could have serious consequences, not least because if we attack Iraq on the basis that it is ruled by an evil and brutal man, what are we to do about Iran and North Korea, which are also part of the axis of evil?

I represent a constituency in which almost 50 per cent. of the electors are Muslim. When I tell them that I am a strong supporter of the American ethos and of America, I am not always popular. I do, however, support America and believe that overall it has done much more good than evil in the world, but I must tell my friends in America that their country does not understand Islam or the Muslim world. That was demonstrated when President Bush called the war against terrorism a crusade. Everyone knows that one does not use that word in the context of an attack on international terrorism. One can talk about evil people, but talking about crusades resurrects centuries-old enmity between Muslims and non-Muslims. That was not a clever thing to do, but it was done out of ignorance. As I said, the Americans do not understand the Muslim world or Islam.

If America, with the support of the United Kingdom, launches a pre-emptive strike against Saddam Hussein, he will become a hero throughout the Muslim world, creating, as others have said, enormous problems for countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, neither of which could be described as the most democratic countries on earth. They are, however, pro-western, and Saudi Arabia is the greatest oil producer in the world. It would not be in the interests of the west or the economies of the United Kingdom or America for Saudi Arabia or Egypt to fall under the control of Iranian fanatics—there would be enormous consequences for all of us.

How would such an attack help the war against international terrorism, bearing in mind the fact that many al-Qaeda operatives captured in Afghanistan were

dissidents from Saudi Arabia and Egypt? As has been said, they would love to displace the house of Saud and the present Egyptian Government. I always thought that one of the perks of being a tyrannical dictator was having absolute power to do what one wants, bleed one's country dry and appoint all one's friends to top positions. I cannot believe that Saddam Hussein would want to put that at risk by attempting or threatening to carry out a pre-emptive strike against America or Israel. He knows perfectly well that the consequences would be nuclear annihilation. I do not think that Saddam Hussein is an idiot. I do not believe that he wants to be the dictator of a pile of rubble in Baghdad. Saddam Hussein has probably caused more suffering and deaths, particularly of Muslims, than anyone else alive today, but the British Government's priorities and those of the Americans should be to pursue international terrorism and the al-Qaeda organisation. I cannot see the political logic or sense of embarking on an adventurist campaign against Iraq, with all the inherent consequences and dangers.

Finally, America, Britain and the western world must pay attention to the reasons why international terrorists emerge. International terrorists are born in the refugee camps in Palestine because they latch on to the issues that they use to justify their terrorist acts. The two biggest issues in the Muslim world used to justify international terrorism are Palestine and Kashmir. Until the western world takes those issues seriously and works to redouble its efforts to resolve them, those refugee camps, whether along the Kashmir border or in Palestine, will continue to be a breeding ground for people who believe that they have God on their side when they fight, as they see it, for the liberation of their people. We must address those issues—if we ignore them, we do so at our peril.

8.16 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): All Members would agree that the House of Commons has been at its best today, with thoughtful and independent-minded speeches from Members on both sides of the House. It is a source of great regret to me and, I am sure, many hon. Members that it has taken so long for the House to be recalled. The ability to recall the House should lie with hon. Members. If a majority want a recall, that should be the case.

I was rather surprised by the expression in the Prime Minister's otherwise extremely thoughtful and well-argued speech this morning about the Chamber being kept "in touch" with the situation, which is reminiscent of a phrase I might use about a relationship with a distant relative. The House of Commons deserves considerably more than that. I echo the anger and frustration of many hon. Members in saying that we had but three and a half hours this morning to look at the dossier. I did not want to read it in the Chamber—I wanted to listen to hon. Members—so that was a discourtesy to the House which, I hope, will not be repeated.

I speak today with some personal feeling because my brother, his wife and two young children were living in Kuwait when it was invaded by Saddam Hussein many years ago. My brother told me how he looked out of his apartment window and saw Kuwaiti soldiers and civilians being shot and mown down in cold blood. As a family we have been affected by what Saddam Hussein has done. I completely accept—there has been agreement on both sides of the House about this—that our overwhelming purpose is to eliminate weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. We must do so through the only organisation able to achieve that—the United Nations. Incidentally, why are the inspectors not being sent in now, as we are being told that evidence is being destroyed? Why must they wait until mid-October? Surely there is an urgent need to get them in as soon as possible. We must, however, use the UN, and there is agreement on both sides of the House about that. It is vital that we stick within the confines of international law and act legally—there is widespread agreement on that.

I support indicting Saddam Hussein. We have seen Milosevic being tried in The Hague. There may be huge practical difficulties in getting Saddam Hussein there, but we should subject him too to the process of international law. Regime change is not and should not be the objective, but I think that we all know in our hearts that it may be and could well be a consequence of what we are talking about.

Why has the issue become so urgent and why are we discussing it now? Has not the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, which we have had for many years, kept the peace? What has changed? The answer could be that since 11 September 2001 we are looking at a different world. For example, let us picture the scenario of a terrorist group getting some of these weapons from Iraq by ship or other means, secreting them on the plains of North Africa and launching an attack against a third-party country. That is the sort of scenario that we are considering, but the dossier is somewhat silent on the Government's assessment of such a risk and the UK's preparedness in terms of civil defence. Middle eastern countries are much better prepared than we are. I ask the Minister to reply specifically to those two points.

We have heard that UN authority has been flouted for 11 or so years with regard to Iraq. Many UN resolutions have not been implemented and should be, but it is no argument to say that because they have not all been implemented, some cannot be. We were right to provide humanitarian help in Rwanda. It was not argued that we should not do so there because we were not doing so elsewhere, and the same logic applies now.

We have heard a lot today about the international community, and I support what has been said. Is not the tragedy the fact that so often America and Britain have had to stand alone? We must remember that it was not, as some might have thought, the rather more suave and sophisticated President Clinton who patiently assembled an alliance of many, many nations before advancing against Afghanistan after 11 September but President Bush. Let us wait and see what he does. Let us judge him on what he has done, not on his recent words. Surely it is important that the UN should be able to call on the military support of many countries, not just be left with UK and US forces. We need to consider seriously what voluntary commitment can be given to the UN so that all the resolutions can be enforced. Of course, those relating to Israel and Palestine are supremely important to what we are discussing.

We must also remember our history. We have heard today about the League of Nations and Abyssinia in 1935. We have heard about German rearmament between 1933 and 1936. I commend the film "The Gathering Storm" to those who have not seen it. We should think of what the House went through in that period, and how its opinion changed over time. We need to reflect on that. We have

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heard more recently about Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, about which some people here had doubts who perhaps later felt that the action taken had been justified.

In the foreword to the dossier the Prime Minister says:

"I believe this issue to be a current and serious threat to the UK national interest."

That may well be the case but the reasons for that do not spring out from the pages before us. Is it because we are worried that Iraq is about to buy missile systems from North Korea which would reach these shores? What is the risk assessment on that? Are the Government concerned about that? Or is it because we are concerned about the release of weapons of mass destruction from Iraq to a terrorist group that will come to this country, or because we are concerned about agents coming to this country and releasing poison in the underground, as happened in Tokyo? We need a much more detailed assessment. The document does not contain sufficient answers. The British people will need that explained to them by the Government. We know that, for security reasons, the Government cannot share all that they know with us, but we need to have the threat explained much more clearly.

The Iraqi opposition e-mailed many Members yesterday with the proposals that the no-fly zone be extended; that Iraqi assets be unfrozen and given to opposition groups; and that Iraqi foreign representation around the world in embassies and so on be changed to reflect the opposition in Iraq. I do not know how practical those proposals are, but we have a duty to examine every option. Again, I should like to hear the Minister's response to that point.

We have to bear it in mind that there will be dictators all over the world looking at the international community. This is a defining moment and we have to believe that what we do here will be looked at. If Saddam Hussein is allowed to get away with his behaviour, he may well be copied by other dictators. That is a serious and onerous responsibility that rests on all hon. Members.

8.25 pm

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): If we should decide to go to war with Iraq, it will not be a war against Saddam Hussein, weapons of mass destruction, or terrorism. Nor will it be a war about liberty, democracy, human rights, or the defence of the Kurds and the Marsh Arabs. As is often the case in war, this war will be about money and power, who controls the Gulf, and setting up a puppet Government in the middle east. Linked to all that, it will be about oil.

We are told that the war will be about weapons of mass destruction and Iraq's threat to use such weapons against the world. That is an ironic claim coming from the United States, which has 25,000 nuclear weapons and warheads, and from the United Kingdom, which has a massive nuclear arsenal. Not even Iraq's neighbours believe that such weapons are a threat to them or the rest of the world.

That claim has been made by the United States, a country that bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing hundreds of thousands of Japanese citizens with atomic bombs—weapons of mass destruction. It has been made by the very same country that carpet-bombed Vietnam with napalm, destroying its crops, environment and the lives of millions of its citizens, once again with weapons of mass destruction, weapons which in theory the United States and the United Kingdom are opposed to. The irony and hypocrisy of America's warning against rogue states, and, in particular, Iraq, having weapons of mass destruction, is also highlighted by its continued economic and military support for Israel—a nuclear weapons state.

Mordecai Vanunu is rotting in an Israeli prison when his only crime was to tell the truth about Israel's nuclear capability when all around him were lying. If this war is about liberty, what have the UK and the US done about Vanunu's liberty? I am ashamed to say that we have done nothing.

We are not simply concerned about nuclear weapons because, as former President Clinton declared in a state of the union address, in the context of Iraq, there is a need to

"confront the new hazards of chemical and biological weapons and the outlaw states, terrorists and organised criminals seeking to acquire them."

The hypocrisy knows no limits. It was the United States who supplied Iraq with much of the matériel required for it to build its biological weapons programme. Those exports continued at least until 1989, despite the fact that Iraq had been reported to be engaged in chemical, and possibly biological, warfare against the Iranians, the Kurds and the Shi'ites since the early 1980s. Yet we are now informed that one of the reasons for war is to protect those very same people.

During the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988, the United States gave military aid and intelligence information not only to Iraq but to both sides. Saddam Hussein was then, as now, an evil psychopath—but then he was the west's evil psychopath and a favoured recipient of weapons and of export credits to subsidise them. Even the Tory Government were prepared to sell him military equipment, including—would you believe it?—plutonium. They actually agreed to the export licence that allowed that to happen.

The United States and the UK also tell us that the war is necessary because of the refusal of Saddam Hussein to allow in the weapons inspectors. Or, at least, they said that before Saddam had agreed to those inspectors going into Iraq. Now that he has agreed, they give the impression that that was not the most important issue. It must also be remembered that the weapons inspectors were in Iraq for about six years after the last war.

For the United States to consider going to war to pursue the goal of weapons inspectors is hypocrisy. Less than a year after the United States Congress passed an Act to implement the chemical weapons convention, the US Senate allowed it to ignore the convention and deny weapons inspections at US facilities. It was agreed that, if there were to be such inspections, the United States could decide who the inspectors would be.

Never short of reasons to go to war, the United States also tells us that this is a punishment for Iraq intervening in or attacking other countries. By that logic, we should also attack Israel, which is invading Palestine and breaking UN resolutions on a daily basis. Will the Government also answer the question posed by Mo Mowlam, when she asked:

"Can you imagine if President Putin had made a similar speech to President Bush"

but had argued that

"Russian forces should be used to enforce UN resolutions against Israel?"

Putting aside that point, it is still hypocritical for the United States to justify war on the ground of one country attacking or intervening in another, when we consider its own record. We should not forget that, since 1945, the United States has intervened in or invaded Albania, Angola, Brazil, Cambodia, China, Chile, Congo, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, East Timor, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Indonesia, Iran, Panama, South Korea, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Uruguay, Vietnam and Zaire. The list goes on, yet little or nothing has been done in response to those acts of aggression or intervention.

We are also led to believe that the war is a crusade against terrorism. Bush uses the tragedy of 11 September to support this claim, yet there has been no evidence that Iraq was involved. President Bush told the United Nations:

"the United States has no quarrel with the Iraqi people; they've suffered too long in silent captivity. Liberty for the Iraqi people is a great moral cause and a great strategic goal. The people of Iraq deserve it."

But if the UK and United States bomb Iraq, the liberty of many Iraqi people will be achieved only by their death. Is that the kind of victory President Bush and our Prime Minister are seeking? Have not the people of Iraq suffered enough in the last war and from the ensuing sanctions, which resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens?

Some years ago Madeleine Albright, then UN ambassador, was reminded of the tragic death of so many people in Iraq as a result of the war and the sanctions, and was asked whether the price was worth it. She replied:

"I think this is a very hard choice, but we think the price is worth it".

I do not, and that is why I will be joining the demonstration against the war on Saturday in London, and why I will use every opportunity not only to protest but to use my vote against the possibility of such a war.

8.33 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): It is somewhat daunting to speak at this stage of the debate, when so many good speeches from both sides of the Chamber have included points with which I agree, but I feel strongly moved to exercise my privilege to speak up, both on my behalf and on behalf of the many constituents who have contacted me about the current military situation.

My resolve was, in many ways, motivated by the words of the Prime Minister, who said that he would not like to have it on his conscience that he had foreseen something awful happening yet done nothing to stop it. As I came to feel increasingly strongly that the prospect of unilateral action against Iraq would cause an appalling international catastrophe, as well as death and destruction for many people, I did not want to have on my conscience the fact that I had not used opportunities available to me to speak up against that unilateral military action.

I am disappointed that there is no substantive motion before us today. I hope that people outside this House will have heard the message from the Chair that it was entirely in the Government's hands as to whether we would have a substantive motion. People outside ask questions. Ordinary people ask, "Why aren't you in Parliament speaking on our behalf? What's the point in electing you lot if you can't debate the issues of the day on substantive motions and express your democratic views by voting in the Division Lobbies?" They do not understand parliamentary procedure.

I hope that two messages have got through: that parliamentary recall and whether we debate substantive motions on such days are utterly dependent on the will of the Government. I commend the work of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) in trying to stir up some debate on procedure, because none of our procedures should be set in stone. I have felt muzzled in exercising my duty to speak up for my constituents.

In the few moments available to me, I want to concentrate on what should have been the fifth condition set out by the Foreign Secretary. He set out four conditions for judging whether military action would be appropriate. The fifth condition, to which many Members have referred, is an assessment of whether military action against Iraq undertaken without the UN's authority—the freely given authority of the UN—would result in the world's being a safer or a less safe place. My concern is that regime change in Iraq may result in "all change" across the middle east, and that we would end up with a very uncertain world that would be considerably less safe than would be the case without military action.

I am disappointed when the spectre of appeasement is raised, as it has been several times. Those of us with concerns are told about appeasement and Germany in the 1930s. The situations of Iraq in 2002 and Germany in the 1930s are totally different. According to the Government's own dossier, Iraq is a country of 23 million people, who mostly live in poverty, not a major military power in the sense that Germany, in the European context, was in the 1930s.

Furthermore, Iraq will never be left alone. Since the invasion of Kuwait, it has been contained more or less successfully, and there is no prospect of its being left entirely alone. Whatever judgment we come to, whether it is in favour or military action, diplomatic or other means, nobody suggests that we just walk away and leave Iraq alone. Had we decided to take action against Germany in the 1930s, which would have been a good idea, we may have taken precisely the kind of measures that we are trying to take against Iraq. There should be no presumption that the only way to deal with a threat is by military action. There are other means, and sometimes those are more appropriate. Sometimes, those other means may avoid pouring petrol on the fires that, as we have been reminded again today, are already burning in the middle east.

My real fear is that a hawkish approach could lead to precisely the kind of west versus Islam war that the terrorists of 11 September wanted—that was their agenda—and that we have all been desperately trying to avoid. Reference has also been made to the huge boost to recruitment for radical terrorist groups if action against Iraq were not seen to be justified. It is no good us saying, "We have the dossiers; we can prove that action is justified." The people on the streets of the countries affected—the streets where recruitment takes place—must also believe that it is justified.

The United Kingdom has seen some of the outcomes in Northern Ireland, where certain actions were taken that resulted in a breeding ground for terrorist recruits. It is

[Mr. Richard Allan]

often the brothers of the victims who sign up and take forward the terrorist banner. Although we may believe and can demonstrate that they are guilty, they believe that they are innocent or were somehow justified in their actions. I can see that military action could give us a lull, but a lull in terrorist activity will be no good whatsoever if the activity returns with a vengeance some years from now.

I was brought up in the context of constant fear of an attack by the Soviet Union. That is what motivated me to become engaged in politics. Lady Thatcher was Prime Minister, and I had no confidence in her ability to protect me and mine from the prospect of nuclear attack. It was literally at that point that I decided that I must sell my soul, join a political party and engage in the regular partisan process.

I do not want another generation of children to grow up with the fears that I had. If I woke up at night during a thunderstorm, I would wait for the crash to come and for the blast wave to roll through. I am making a serious point about the way in which we were brought up. Living in fear is not a pretty prospect, and people are speaking out against it now. We do not want to be in a permanent state of war.

I am afraid of what Saddam Hussein and Iraq may do; anyone would be right to be afraid of that. But we have another fear that I think is very justified: the fear that in seeking to remove one obstacle we shall end up creating a structure of permanent war. If the wrong judgment is made, there is a real prospect of a war that will roll on for years.

I wish that a motion were before us today that allowed the expression of what I consider to be a broad consensus. I refer to those who say, "We are happy for the Government to negotiate and work in our name under the auspices of the UN, but not outwith those auspices. If they want to do that, they should come back later and seek authorisation." Regrettably no such motion is before us, but I think there has been a strong expression of will from the House making it clear that war should be the route of last resort and that it is the UN route with which people feel comfortable.

I believe that any presumption that the United Kingdom should sign up to a United States policy that seeks to make weapons inspections fail in order to justify military action that the US already wants, and to which it is already committed, would receive no support in the House or the country.

8.42 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I thank the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) for confirming what many of us have long believed—that joining the Liberal Democrats involves a Faustian bargain.

Let me say at the outset that I support the way in which the Government have handled this situation in recent months, in terms both of the objectives they have pursued and the manner in which they have pursued those objectives. They have been strengthened in their resolve by the speech the Prime Minister made to the TUC a few weeks ago, and by today's publication, albeit necessarily limited, of the dossier. They have also been heartened—I shall return to this shortly—by the speech made by President Bush to the United Nations.

I feel that today the House may, to an extent, have been in danger of overstating the role and capability of the United Nations. Let me make it clear that I am not against the United Nations; along with, presumably, every other MP, I am a strong supporter of it. I believe that the UN is all that we have, and that we need to work with it as vigorously and constructively as possible. Nevertheless, while the United Nations has power to wish for the ends, it often has no power to deliver them. That is a difficulty that we have seen repeatedly over many years, not least in respect of world opinion on Iraq.

How do we resolve the difficulty? It is not easy. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) and, I think, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) said that we should call Saddam's bluff. I agree with that, but we cannot do it simply by passing another Security Council resolution, important though that is. I hope that the Security Council will pass a resolution stating what should happen, with a deadline for various stages of arms inspection, but we know from experience that Saddam is likely simply to ignore it.

If we are to call Saddam's bluff, it is first necessary that he believes that if he flouts a further Security Council resolution there will be action. For him to believe that, he must believe that we believe it. If he believes that debates here and in other forums are all about words and not about actions, he will carry on in his own sweet way, as he has in the past, because he knows that he can get away with it.

I want to touch on two further issues. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) was the most coherent exponent of a view echoed by many others, and he gave detailed evidence to support his contention that the American Administration want to go far further than most hon. Members, and perhaps even our own Government, would want to go over Iraq and perhaps other issues. It is difficult to respond to that. He gave detailed quotations and named names, quoting what people had said not only in office but before they were elected.

Clearly, there is cause for concern, but we are not responsible for the American Administration. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have some influence in that direction, but we cannot accept responsibility for what may at any time be in the mind of people in the American Administration. What we have to go on is what President Bush said on his most recent visit to the United Nations, which I believe was perfectly reasonable, even if I am not entirely happy with elements of his argument. His general thrust and policy direction were clear, and they are certainly not as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton and others portrayed them.

I do not know precisely what is in President Bush's mind—I certainly do not know what is in the mind of the many advisers who have been referred to today—so all I have to go on are the words that he used in a very important international forum. We should accept those words for what they are: they were sensibly measured and on the whole a reasonable statement of America's position, although I have some reservations, and not a thousand miles from the sentiments expressed by our Government over recent months.

The second issue was referred to by the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor): the question of where Russia fits into all this. Courtesy of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central and I, along with others, were invited to speak to Members of the Duma in Moscow, in an effort to forge better relationships and better understanding there. I was grateful for that interesting experience, even though it was minus 20 degrees there at the time. I make a plea to the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), who is sitting on the Treasury Bench: if the Government want me to go on any such ventures in future, I would rather that it was somewhere slightly warmer than Moscow in December.

It became clear to us on that visit that President Putin and those in the political system in Russia want to do the right thing. They want to play the full part that they are entitled to play, given their status on the world stage, but they feel on occasion that they are pulled in certain directions without there being any proper understanding of their own problems. I am not talking about a quid pro quo situation, with Russia getting something that it wants in return for supporting action in Iraq. However, Russia has concerns about terrorism in Chechnya, its developing role in NATO and its continuing and growing relationship with the European Union, particularly in the light of enlargement. I believe that greater regard needs to be paid to Russia's concerns. Whatever happens in the coming months, Russia will clearly play a part.

In conclusion, I believe that until now we have done the right thing. What is proposed—the actual words spoken by the Government and others—is supportable. I also believe that the alternative of words without the threat of action would mean that Saddam Hussein had won. Iraq would pose a continuous threat in the middle east and, above all, the people of Iraq would have no hope for the future.

8.52 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): It seems sad that in a debate in which we are contemplating the quality of life for families in the middle east and the worry and anxiety of people across the world, so few women have spoken.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), I wish to express my concerns about the debate and where we will go as a result of what we have heard today. I am sure that no Member remained unmoved on 11 September this year as we listened to the roll call of the people who died last year. They were clearly family members; some families lost one, two or even three people. We pondered on the impact of such a loss of life on individual members of many families from America and from other parts of the world, including the United Kingdom. We grieved once more with those people, but unilateral action would not have brought back those lives or prevented what happened.

Like many others, I have had masses of letters, e-mails, telephone calls and messages from my constituents, all asking me to reflect their opposition to war and to action in Iraq. I am glad that Parliament has been recalled; I am grateful to the Prime Minister for recognising the depth of concern that is felt. However, it is still late, and I am concerned that if we do not obtain satisfaction from Iraq, we will send troops into Iraq pell-mell without having the opportunity to vote on such action. I sincerely hope that we will be given that chance.

In considering the possibility of military action, I ask myself why we are going. What will we do there? What do we hope to achieve? How will we know when we have achieved it? What will the damage be along the way, and is that damage and loss of life justified? I do not believe that the dossier has given us sufficient information to go back into Iraq at this stage. It does not provide proof that Iraq is a threat to the United States. The map does not show missiles that are coming in the direction of the United Kingdom. It does not show us much of which we are not already aware.

We are aware that Iraq is trying to rebuild its biological and nuclear weapons programmes and we are aware of the risk of weapons of mass destruction, but such weapons are held by many other countries including Israel, Pakistan, India and Brazil. Israel has refused to comply with UN resolutions and I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister announce today that there will be much more effort towards securing the long overdue peace in the middle east. It should have been a greater focus of our attention in the past.

Iraq oppresses its people and its human rights record is appalling. We cannot support that. There is no support for war from the Iraqi people, either those living in Iraq or the critics of the regime who have sought sanctuary in other countries. The support comes from those in the United States who are looking to put in place an alternative to the current regime. Is there a natural replacement for Saddam Hussein, despicable as he might be? We do not see an obvious replacement and we are looking at the prospect of civil war in Iraq and in that region for years to come.

A civil war would mean enormous loss of life, particularly of children and families because we know that Saddam has deployed armaments in schools and in the suburbs, but that does not make it acceptable for us to take military action.

Many have said—I agree with them—that Saddam Hussein is unlikely to launch a pre-emptive strike on his neighbours. He knows what it would bring. However, if we were to launch a pre-emptive strike on Saddam, we know that it would involve his neighbours. We know that Israel is capable of launching an immediate further attack and that it is likely that there would be proliferation across the middle east with untold damage and destruction and no way of putting the genie back in the bottle. I do not want that to happen in my name and that is why we are here today.

We need firm evidence that any attempt by Iraq to rebuild its military has a more menacing aim than defending its own security. Our prime concern must be what will happen to the Iraqi people. The Government have said very little about that, although we know that the Secretary of State for International Development is unhappy.

Any action would mean a massive loss of civilian lives and, as in the Gulf war, would involve tens of thousands of Iraqi conscripts. Also, there is no doubt that the battle would be drawn into populated urban areas. War would inevitably interrupt the supply of food and medicine. A total of 60 per cent. of northern Iraqis are already dependent on food rations. There would be a huge displacement of people. There are already between 700,000 and 1 million displaced people in Iraq. Many would flee areas in which fighting was taking place and there would undoubtedly be a humanitarian disaster.

[Sue Doughty]

I have talked about regional stability and mentioned the problems for some of the countries of the middle east such as Saudi Arabia, but what would happen to Turkey with its ailing Prime Minister? Would it continue to be a western-facing secular state? What would happen to the Turkish Kurds if the Iraqi Kurds attempted to declare an independent Kurdistan? We would also see the collapse of the coalition against terrorism, which has had support from the Arab nations.

There is much more that we can do on the diplomatic front. We need the inspectors to go in as soon as possible. We do not want them to go in in two or three weeks, we need them to go in now. However imperfect the arrangements might be, they must be more perfect than plans for a possible war. We must give inspectors the opportunity to continue their work so that they can identify the problems. We must allow them to produce their reports so that they can be taken back to the Security Council of the United Nations.

We have to examine our role in the arms trade and the stability of the middle east. We have to find out who is supplying arms and lean on them. We also have to consider future efforts to encourage stability by restricting arms exports. There is much more that we can do.

This is an issue for the UN. It also requires increased diplomatic work with our partners in Muslim states, asking them what pressure they can bring to bear. It is certainly not an issue for unilateral action. Instead, we have to do all that we can to bring peace to a most troubled part of the world, remembering that if we take action it will not be just us who suffer, but many people in the middle east. We will have to accept our part in any action that takes place.

9.1 pm

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): This has been a good debate. I shall concentrate on some of the points that have been made, particularly by those who have expressed scepticism or opposition to the course of action outlined by the Prime Minister in his statement this morning.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned the doctrine of pre-emptive strike or attack. Most hon. Members who have expressed some scepticism about the British and American positions have mentioned this notion. I agree that the notion of a pre-emptive strike is a problematic doctrine that most of us would not rush to embrace. I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) that it is important to look at the wider context. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the concept of pre-emptive action has obscured what is at the heart of the issue.

Nobody is suggesting a Pearl Harbour—a pre-emptive attack upon Iraq completely out of the blue. The issue is not pre-emptive action; it is long delayed and long overdue enforcement of UN resolutions which cover the disarmament of weapons of mass destruction and which Iraq has been flouting for more than 10 years. Moreover, it has not been emphasised strongly enough during the debate that the terms of these resolutions, particularly 687, were part of the conditions of the ceasefire agreement at the end of the Gulf war in 1991. So by refusing to implement those resolutions from 1991 until today, Iraq is in breach of the ceasefire agreement that it signed in 1991 as well as of numerous UN resolutions since.

In our efforts to get Iraq to comply with the resolutions, we have been grappling politically and militarily with the Iraqi regime for a decade. We have made regular bombing attacks to enforce the no-fly zones and international sanctions have crippled the Iraqi economy. All this has been done at a cost in lives and in misery for the Iraqi population. It has also been done at considerable diplomatic and political cost for western countries, particularly in respect of their perception by the Arab world.

That is the background against which we have to weigh up the course of action before us and decide between the various options. One option that has been advocated today is simply to continue this pattern of bombing and sanctions year in, year out, into the future. Nobody has said how long it might be necessary to continue that mix of bombing and sanctions. Would it be another five years, 10 years, 20 years or whenever Saddam's son, who is even more unstable, succeeds him? If we pursue that option Saddam will continue to defy the United Nations, to develop his weapons of mass destruction and to keep the Iraqi people in the grip of poverty and tyranny. Under the status quo option the credibility of the UN will continue to erode and crumble.

Let us recall the terms of resolution 1154 of March 1998 which said that non-compliance by Iraq would lead to "the severest consequences". Iraq did not comply, but there were no consequences. That has been the pattern for the last 10 years. The result has been a steady but critical erosion of the credibility of the UN and an erosion, too, of the willingness of the international community to see the resolution enforced.

Another option, which has been mentioned in previous debates on the topic but which has not been suggested today, is to lift the sanctions and stop policing the no-fly zones. If we follow that course, it will give Saddam all the revenue he needs to accelerate his weapons programmes, and allow him to take revenge at a time of his choosing upon the Kurds and others who have defied him, and it would in effect reward the Iraqi Government for 10 years of persistent and flagrant breaching of UN resolutions. The Security Council would be shown to be toothless.

Caught between those two alternatives, the international community is right to try a new approach. The UN must make it absolutely clear to Saddam that he must uphold UN resolutions and disarm without any preconditions. There not being any preconditions is an important part of these resolutions. The UN must make it absolutely clear to Saddam that he must comply or else risk the end of his regime.

Of course that means a return of inspectors and allowing those inspectors time to carry out their task. Those who call so strongly for the return of the inspectors as the necessary way forward out of the current impasse must accept the consequence of the inspectors coming back to the UN and reporting, as they did over the last decade, that they have not been allowed to carry out their task.

This must genuinely be the last warning. If Saddam resists or tries to get round the UN disarmament requirements in any way whatsoever, the international

community must make him comply by force. There must be no more last chances. The UN must not shrink from enforcing its clear and repeated resolutions.

Those who worry about the consequences of a confrontation express genuine concerns, but we should not overstate the strength of the Iraqi regime. Where a Government lack popular support and where they are no longer able to enforce their will through terror, recent precedent shows that they can quickly collapse.

I want to emphasise what is for me the central point. For 10 years the UN has been trying to get the Iraqi Government to comply with its resolutions on weapons of mass destruction. For 10 years the Iraqi Government have defied the UN. Sanctions have been only partially successful and at considerable cost. Earlier, somebody suggested offering to lift sanctions in return for disarmament. That offer has already been made. It was made in resolution 1284 in 1999, which laid out a timetable for lifting sanctions, but that too was rejected by the Iraqi Government.

Some argue that Saddam is at bottom rational, so presents no threat to the west. Those who argue that Saddam is rational must explain why, over those 10 years, instead of giving up his weapons programme, he has preferred his country to be a diplomatic pariah and an economic cripple. If he is rational, he must have a truly frightening use in mind for these weapons to risk so much to hold on to them.

Others have asked why deterrence cannot work in the way that it supposedly has for the past number of years. Deterrence cuts both ways. If Iraq would hesitate to use weapons of mass destruction because of the danger of massive response from us, the same would apply to us if Iraq possessed an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. Saddam would also make us hesitate in future about how we chose to confront him, and that would change the regional balance critically.

Sanctions have been tried. Diplomacy has been tried. The waiting game has been tried. Ten years is long enough. It is time for the UN to enforce its will.

9.11 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): It is more than appropriate that this issue is at last being discussed here, in the House of Commons. After all, this Chamber where we, the elected Members of Parliament of this country, sit should be the fulcrum of our national debate. It is more than absurd that the possible further deployment of British armed forces has been the subject of debate everywhere, but has only now been brought to the House for discussion.

It has been an excellent debate and I particularly want to comment on some of the wonderful speeches that we have heard from the Back Benches. The speeches by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and by the hon. Members for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) were truly remarkable. They questioned the Government in a way that Members on the Conservative Front Bench have not done. Indeed, the only questioning of the Government has come from Conservative and Labour Back Benchers, and indeed from the Liberal Democrats.

I remind the House that it was not the leader of the Conservative party who first called for this Chamber to be recalled; it was actually the leader of the Liberal Democrats. I would suggest to those Conservatives who have questioned our resolve, in the final analysis, to take military action that they read the *Official Report* tomorrow and see the response of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) when he was intervened on by the Leader of the Opposition. I am afraid that his response to the Leader of the Opposition was not proportionate: it was overwhelming.

The publication of the dossier today has been welcomed, although it could have been published earlier. However, I am not convinced that this publication has thrown any light on the issues that we are discussing. The objectives of a course of action remain unclear. Yes, Saddam Hussein must give up his weapons of mass destruction. Yes, he must not seek to develop them and yes, disarmament should be the first objective of international action. But if Britain is to join with others in ensuring that Iraq complies with its obligations to disarm, are we clear in our mind about what the role of any military force may be?

The Foreign Secretary has claimed that regime change is not the policy of the Government, nor will it be an objective of military action; so how do the Government propose to enforce Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions, should that be necessary? Would it be by bombing Baghdad? Would it be by invading Baghdad with ground troops?

Regime change appears to many to be outside international law, so how do the Government and our US allies intend to conduct a military campaign that does not have regime change as an objective? In short, what exactly is it that we are threatening Saddam with?

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The Liberals.

Mr. Keetch: It is quite clear that the anti-Liberal Democrat unit set up by the Conservative Opposition has gone into overdrive because they are concerned that Liberal Democrat Members are asking these questions.

If diplomacy fails, would the Prime Minister be willing to support military action that is not supported by the United Nations or even by some of our NATO allies? I hope not. Has he considered the consequences for our other joint military operations? I hope so. Will there be, as has been called for on both sides of the House, a further debate, with a full vote, before more of our armed forces are committed to further military operations? There ought to be such a vote, because President Bush is prepared to give one to the US Congress, and the British people would find it hard to understand why a British Prime Minister, with a majority the size of the current one and the unflinching support of the official Opposition, would not be prepared to allow such a vote in the House.

Some hon. Members have said that we are about to start military action, but of course we are already engaged in military action above Iraq in the no-fly zones. I should like to reiterate that the Liberal Democrats believe that further military action should be a last resort; it should be considered only if Iraq's recent offer to re-admit inspectors is violated, if clear and incontrovertible evidence is presented to the international community to show that disarmament cannot proceed in any other way, if all possible steps have been taken to obtain a new UN resolution, if there are clear military objectives, and if the military action carried out is designed so far as possible to avoid civilian casualties.

[Mr. Keetch]

Moreover, we should also consider the implications for the wider middle east and the complications for the so-called campaign against terrorism. Where will that leave us? The Government should consider carefully and prepare for the humanitarian consequences of any action that takes place.

It has been said that our quarrel is not with the ordinary people of Iraq. That is true. Yet again, this crisis shows that occasionally our armed forces will be called upon to fulfil war-fighting as well as peacekeeping roles. If we ask them to defend us, we have a duty to ensure that they have the best equipment and resources to do the job.

As the Minister of State will know, the recent British exercise, Saif Sareea II, in Oman highlighted many technical shortcomings in our military equipment in the desert. I need not remind him about the concerns that have been expressed about the SA80 rifle, the boots that melt in the sun and the tanks that jam in the sand. If there is to be action, will our troops be properly equipped?

We all know that Saddam Hussein is adept at exploiting divisions in the international community to buy time, so the Liberal Democrats believe that we should keep up the pressure on Iraq, but at the same time we must keep the door to diplomacy open. So I say again that the Liberal Democrats are united—*[Interruption]*—unlike the Conservative party, in our scepticism of the Government's strategy.

We remain unconvinced that the case for war has as yet been made. We believe that a diplomatic approach could still work and in the priority of ensuring the return of weapons inspectors. We are firm in our resolve that Saddam Hussein should know that prevarication has consequences, and we speak for many people beyond the House in saying that, if military action is to be considered, there should be a substantive vote in the House of Commons.

9.18 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): There can be no hon. Member who does not have some constituents in the armed services, but some of us have thousands, as has been mentioned, and early in the career of any such Member comes the constant preoccupation—if it is not already there—to monitor and consider such issues, the scale of the threat and the proportionate action to that threat.

In addition to that consideration, my constituency has been host to a small community of Iraqi asylum seekers during the past two years, and their concerns and those of the volunteers and religious communities who help them with their legal, health and education services are a constant reminder of just how vile the regime that we talking about is. It is also a reminder of the strength of longing and the preparedness of the Iraqi community in exile in this country to return and to try to build a better country when they may be given the chance to do so.

Many hon. Members have mentioned their constituents' concerns, and I am a great believer in not just waiting for people to come to me with their concerns because that very often gives a slanted and skewed version of the range of our constituents' concerns. So, over the past month, I have been trying to be proactive—ringing my constituents and party members to ask them what they make of the present situation. I have been asking not the sort of closed question that is so often put to people, "Are you in favour of war?" but the more open question, "What do you make of the current situation?" Many have expressed much more thoughtful and considered views than the natural response to the closed question, which, inevitably, is "No" in about 90 or 95 per cent. of cases.

People have expressed concern mainly by saying, "Well I'm not sure; I don't think there is a threat that warrants the sort of action that people are talking about," or, "I just don't know enough about it. There ought to be some more information available to us to help us share the problems that are surrounding us." There are others who say, "Yes, I do believe that there is a scale of threat that warrants some action, but nevertheless I feel that I need some more information."

Those of us for whom the issue is a preoccupation know that much of that information has been present for a long time. It is evident in the books that have been written by the weapons inspectors—by Butler, Ritter and Tim Evan among others. It is there on the United Nations website, and in the reports of UNSCOM and the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission. It is there in the dossier of the International Institute for Strategic Studies that was published last week. We also receive a host of briefings from the House of Commons Library and, indeed, I am not sure that I heard any Member make particular reference to an excellent briefing from the Library which was published on 20 September.

The report that we have received today does not add that much more information to what is available from all those sources, but it serves a very useful purpose by bringing the information together and by putting into language that is accessible to our constituents the breadth and depth of the suspicions that many of us have shared, that thousands of scientists in Iraq have been very busy.

The dossier has made such information more accessible, but sadly it confirms that the devil has found work to ensure that those scientists have not been idle. It is clear that there are now greater and growing resources of weapons, matérials, know-how and, indeed, means of their delivery. Doing nothing to stem that growth is no longer an option—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are far too many conversations going on in the Chamber. That is impolite and unfair to the hon. Lady who is addressing the House.

Linda Gilroy: The emphasis on the role of the United Nations, which has emerged more clearly over the past week and today, is very welcome. The likelihood of weapons inspectors standing any chance of being allowed to do their job quickly, fully and effectively, bringing to an end the 11-year cat and mouse game, which one commentator has called cheat-and-retreat flouting of the UN resolutions, has been one of the big worries for my constituents and myself. I must say to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) that to think that journalists can rush around Iraq verifying something that stretched and challenged highly skilled, equipped and trained weapons inspectors is laughable.

Like most in this House and in my constituency, I have attached great importance to doing everything possible to work through the United Nations as the international body

that fulfils the capacity to meet our aspirations of a more stable world, rather than failing our aspirations and leaving us hopeless. To achieve that, when dealing with someone of Saddam's character and track record, we must face him with a credible threat of force that will have the certainty of removing what he so assiduously seeks to retain in building up his lethal armoury in the way that today's assessment makes clear that he is doing. I have a very strong preference for making sure that every effort is made to do that through the UN. That policy would underline the point about its importance, as it is the best available way of building the broad coalition of interests that, in the long term, will stand us in the strongest stead in meeting the challenges that this century is clearly going to hold for us.

Two years ago, four or five of us went to the UN with a delegation to look at how the body could work to bring peace and stability to the world. As a first time visitor to New York as well as to the UN, I was struck by the labyrinthine nature of the UN and the huge challenges of trying to make the body work in all our interests. It is now under the leadership of Kofi Annan and he has gone a long way to making the body more workable. However, we should not underestimate the grave difficulties that lie right at the heart of it in the Security Council to bring about the effective leadership that can make the task that we face in Iraq work. One has only to read the accounts of what happened in 1998 and 1999 to understand that there was ambivalence right at the heart of the UN about the work of the weapons inspectors. That shows what a difficult task they will face when they return to Iraq.

Two years ago when I was on that delegation, I bought in the bookshop at the UN a copy of Dag Hammarskjöld's meditations "Markings". I cannot remember the exact quotation so I paraphrase one of his earliest meditations. He said that, to find the right road, we should not look down at every next step but keep our eye on the far horizon. In fact, we will need to do both in the months ahead. However, like most people in the House and in my constituency, I strongly believe that the best chance of stability, security and sanity in the world must have the UN firmly at its compass.

Mr. Galloway: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is an extraordinary rumour sweeping the Palace that, having failed to table a substantive motion, the Government will not even have the courage to vote for the Adjournment at 10 o'clock. So afraid are they of the large number of Labour Members of Parliament who would not be with them in the Lobby. They are frightened to face—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are always rumours in the Palace of Westminster.

9.28 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): It has been a long day but an important and interesting debate for the House to have held. I follow the speech of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy). Many of us have service men in our constituencies, and I put it to her that every Member of the House takes seriously the responsibility to our service men. Of course, it is the loneliest and hardest decision for Ministers to make when they determine whether to commit our service men to military action. We share that serious responsibility with them.

The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) made a different speech from most others in the Chamber. We perhaps heard today the third position from the Liberal Democrats. *[Interruption.]* Yes, from those on the Front Bench. We originally heard the leader of the Liberal Democrats, who would not comment on whether military action should be contemplated, but I am pleased that those on the Liberal Democrat Front Bench have come in our direction on that question. His colleague the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) made it clear that military action could not be contemplated without another UN resolution, which he regarded as "essential". However, the hon. Member for Hereford used an altogether different form of words and said that action should not be considered unless

"all possible steps have been taken to obtain a new UN resolution",

not making it clear whether it had to be obtained or not. I leave it to hon. Members on both sides of the House to try to work out the Liberal Democrats' position.

The main purpose of our debate has been to allow the Government to set out their case for the policy that they have adopted in recent weeks on Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction. Not only was the Prime Minister broadly supported by the Leader of the Opposition, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) supported the Foreign Secretary. I commend in particular two speeches, that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who set out clearly five points in support of the Government's policy, and that of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), which Labour Members should take seriously.

Our debate is both necessary and long overdue. It was essential to publish the dossier, for which we have been calling for a considerable time. I join my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who all said that the dossier should have come much sooner. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) for pointing out that only a few months ago the Government were trying to shut down discussion of the prospect of military action against Iraq, which has made it more difficult for them to make a clear and unambiguous case.

A broad consensus has emerged on the dossier and the evidence, which is broadly accepted by Members on both sides of the House. The nature of the regime is accepted on both sides of the House and I would even go so far as to say that its mentality and intentions, as well as the potential threat that it poses, are broadly accepted by the House. Differences have emerged about two substantial issues, the first of which is regime change. I shall deal with that briefly as the argument is in danger of becoming one about angels on a pinhead. Obviously, to set out to change a regime as a policy objective is questionable in international law—we agree with the Government's position. To deny, however, that that might be a consequence of one's actions is a completely different matter. I put it to people who cavil about regime change that forcing Saddam Hussein to dismantle his weapons of mass destruction and the means of their production, research and concealment is unlikely to be achieved without regime change. People who talk openly about regime change, like the Prime Minister, are only being realistic. To put it in perspective, President Clinton declared himself in favour of regime change on 15 November 1998.

[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]

The other outstanding difference concerns the role of the UN. The main question is whether a further resolution is required to legitimise military action if Saddam Hussein refuses to comply. It was clear from questions put to the Prime Minister this morning that he is keeping that option open. He is not ruling out moving to military action even if we run into difficulties and are unable to secure unanimity on a UN resolution. The Opposition have no doubt that the Prime Minister is right to make that clear in his military and strategic point of view.

There has been much complaint about the United States attitude and its new strategic doctrine, but it is as incumbent upon the House to try to understand the United States as it is upon the United States to understand attitudes in Europe. One of the most dangerous features of the international scene since September 2001 has been the drifting apart of Europe and the United States.

The United States understands perhaps better than we in Europe do how the strategic environment has changed. That is the link that exists between 11 September and Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. We live in a much more dangerous and unpredictable world than we thought we did and unless we are prepared to respond to those new and clear dangers, we are playing into the hands of those who would carry out further terrorist atrocities.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said that surely Saddam Hussein would have to be irrational to use his weapons of mass destruction. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are too many conversations going on in the Chamber and that is unfair to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker.

Every dictator in history has acted irrationally—Hitler acted irrationally, Galtieri clearly acted irrationally, and Saddam Hussein acted irrationally when he invaded Kuwait. Given how irrational Saddam Hussein can be, he may well choose to deliver his weapons of mass destruction himself or through some proxy terrorist organisation, as my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) made clear in his speech.

There has been much talk in the Chamber this evening about the relevance of deterrence, but deterrence no longer works. It is rather ironic that throughout the cold war many Labour Members said that deterrence—mutually assured destruction—was a crazy concept, but now that it no longer works, they all support the doctrine of deterrence. History has moved on.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North) *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I have little time. I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. I shall be as quick as I can.

Let us study the new Bush doctrine. I beg the House to bear with me while I read out a short part of President Bush's national security strategy. It states:

"For centuries, international law recognised that nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger of attack. Legal scholars and international jurists often conditioned the legitimacy of pre-emption on the existence of an imminent threat—most often a visible mobilisation of armies, navies, and air forces preparing to attack."

It continues:

"We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries."

Those who are unable to embrace a new strategic doctrine for the defence of our own countries are people who are unable to adapt to the reality and objectives of today's adversaries.

The Government are showing every evidence of fully understanding that reality, and although no defence policy document has been produced they are adopting the same policy of pre-emption by supporting President Bush in his attitude towards Iraq. Is that dangerous or is it just common sense? I put it to the House that it is common sense.

How would it be if the Prime Minister came to the House in a year or two's time after a terrible terrorist atrocity had been committed against our own country and said that it was known that there was a threat but the Government did not think that they could take any action because of the state of international law. Of course, that is not the state of international law. International law would never be such an ass.

Are the Government prepared to show the courage expressly to embrace the Bush doctrine on pre-emption? They behave as though they are, and it is incumbent on them to explain the legal basis of it in international law. In 1998, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) expressly stated:

"As to the United Nations, we are absolutely clear that we have thorough clear backing in UN resolutions"

for military action. He went on to say that

"the resolutions . . . give us clear United Nations authority."

The right hon. Gentleman said that in 1998, but we need to know what is the legal basis of such a statement today. That is why we have been asking the Government to produce their legal opinion for the House. That is not unprecedented; it not an unreasonable request. There are other opinions, such as that produced by Rabinder Singh QC and Alison Macdonald, who make it clear that, in their view, any attack against Iraq

"would not be justified under international law unless:

Iraq mounted a direct attack"

or it could be demonstrated that an attack

"was imminent",

or

"the United Nations Security Council authorised the use of force in clear terms."

The Government have clearly not accepted this particular legal advice. What legal advice have they accepted?

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I am not going to give way because there is so little time.

We clearly cannot rule out the prospect of military action after so many years of defiance from Saddam Hussein. It is too early to say what kind of military action may be involved, or to ask the Government what sort of preparations are being made for such action. It is fair to

say, however, that we will be asking many questions about the preparedness of the United Kingdom's armed forces to contribute meaningfully to any military action.

The one point on which I agree with the hon. Member for Hereford is that we have to clear up the question of the SA80 rifle before we send our troops into action. We must also learn the lessons of Saif Sareea that were so ably set out in the Public Accounts Committee report under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). I endorse very strongly the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), who asked what preparations were being made for the inoculation of our troops to prepare for the possibility of exposure to chemical and biological attack. I ask the Minister expressly to address this point, because we do not want to go through what we went through in the aftermath of the Gulf war.

There has also not been enough preparation from the Government for the consequences of military action. Given that regime change is the most likely outcome of such action, we must be prepared to envisage the post-Saddam scenario to make the threat of military action credible. What talks have the Government had with opposition groups in Iraq? I know that the United States Administration are in constant dialogue with a number of such groups. What discussions are we having? What preparations are we making for humanitarian relief, police training, military training and all the other necessary building blocks to ensure that a new interim Administration can quickly become established?

Nothing can conceal the challenge that faces our country, the international community and the House. We have to face the fact that, even if nobody wants war—and nobody does—we cannot rule out the use of military force. We must stay within the rule of international law, pursue the widest possible international co-operation through the United Nations to achieve the best possible coalition, and be prepared to take the necessary action when the time comes.

Our obligation is fundamentally to future generations, who would not thank us for ducking these challenges. Like other hon. Members, I have been to Kabul and seen the result of the military action that we took in Afghanistan. I have no doubt that the people of Iraq would welcome such military action when it finally came to be made.

9.45 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Let me begin—

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House is becoming crowded around the Division Lobby Doors. Is there any chance that they will be free by the time we get to a Division, if we do so?

Mr. Speaker: The problem will be resolved.

Mr. Ingram: Let me begin again by thanking all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions to the debate, which has been passionate, wide-ranging and thorough. The number of interventions on the Prime Minister was 25, the Foreign Secretary took eight and there have been 50 Back-Bench speakers. A range of opinions has been expressed. The people of this country can take confidence from the fact that their fundamental concerns, fears and wishes in respect of how we deal with the threat posed by Saddam Hussein have been comprehensively aired during the debate.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary set out two critical questions that we had to address in this debate: has the threat from Saddam Hussein increased; and should we take action to address that threat and, if so, what action?

It is clear that there is unanimity in this House on the central fact that Saddam Hussein's regime is barbaric and evil. The dossier published today sets out in graphic detail the extent of the horrors that Saddam Hussein has imposed on his own people month in, month out, year in, year out. The deaths and deprivation that he has imposed have been rightly condemned across the House by all who have contributed to the debate, from those who accept the Government's case to those who retain doubts and those who will probably never be convinced of the present course of action on which the Government are embarked.

I cannot possibly answer all the points that have been raised in the debate in the time available, but let me deal with a few of the contributions made. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) asked about the health and welfare of our troops and what action we have taken since the 1990–91 Gulf conflict. The well-being of the personnel we deploy is of the greatest importance to us, and we have made some important improvements based on that experience. We have put in place a range of measures. We now ensure that all troops are immunised routinely with the standard service immunisations. We commission up-to-date medical intelligence briefings for parts of the world where UK troops may operate, and force health protection plans are then prepared for specific operations.

New equipment for the detection and the hazard management of chemical and biological warfare threats has been introduced. We have introduced a new operational medical record form intended to ensure that health events while on deployment are more systematically recorded than in the past. We cannot of course guarantee that deployed forces will not suffer ill health, but we are doing everything we can to minimise the risks.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) made a thought-provoking speech. He raised a number of vital questions, all of them pointing to the complexity of the problems that we face, now and in the future. He rightly pointed to the preference for a stringent UN resolution with a strict timetable. Other right hon. and hon. Members made the same point. The Government agree with that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) seemed to support the main thrust of the Government's approach, and echoed the views of my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East. However, I have one point of difference with him: I do not wholly go along with his assertion that the problem of Iraq can be solved only once the problem of the middle east is resolved. I would suggest to him that dealing with Saddam Hussein as we propose could greatly assist the peace process in the middle east.

[Mr. Ingram]

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) asked whether the Foreign Secretary stood by his commitment to the primacy of the United Nations. Let me read again what the Foreign Secretary said in opening this debate. He said:

"only free and unfettered inspections, backed by a Security Council united in its determination to disarm Iraq, offer the prospect of dealing with the threat by peaceful means."

A peaceful conclusion is the outcome desired on both sides of the Atlantic, by Her Majesty's Government and by the United States Administration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked whether United States air force aircraft at Diego Garcia carried nuclear weapons. As he knows, it has been the practice of successive Governments never to confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons at any particular location or at any particular time. I have no intention of deviating from that line—unless I end up, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), with a premature end to my career.

My right hon. Friend asked about the situation in Iraq after Saddam Hussein, as did others. If and when Saddam Hussein leaves power, whenever that is, it will be for the Iraqi people to determine their future government. I suggest that such discussions are premature. The task facing us now is the disarming of Saddam Hussein: that is our aim on which we are focused.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) reminded the House that in the 1980s he was outside the Iraqi embassy protesting about the atrocities being committed in Iraq. Let me point out to him that most of us are still outside the Iraqi embassy, because the atrocities and the barbarism have continued. We need to tackle Saddam Hussein with resolve, rather than offering encouragement by directing our criticisms elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman asked whose side we were on. Perhaps he should ask himself whose side he is on.

Mr. Galloway *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not going to give way.

Mr. Galloway *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have to make a point of order.

Mr. Galloway: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Minister has attacked me specifically by name, and does not have the guts to give way.

Mr. Speaker: We have kept the debate calm throughout the day, and we want to keep it that way.

Mr. Ingram: Let me say in passing that the hon. Gentleman did not give way to Members seeking to intervene on his speech.

Mr. Galloway *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am reluctant to speak to the hon. Gentleman again, but the Minister is clearly not going to give way. The hon. Gentleman would do better to remain in his seat.

Mr. Galloway: Coward.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Sadly, I heard that remark. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw it. I strongly advise him to do so.

Mr. Galloway: Is it not the case, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to the hon. Gentleman that he must withdraw that remark. I will listen to a point of order, but he must withdraw that remark.

Mr. Galloway: I do withdraw that remark.

Mr. Speaker: Has the hon. Gentleman a point of order?

Mr. Galloway: My point of order is this, Mr. Speaker. Is it not custom and practice for a Member who is attacked by another, by name, to be allowed to rise and answer the point?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair. I call the Minister.

Mr. Ingram: The British Government have long made clear their firm commitment to containing the very real threat posed by Saddam Hussein's regime to the stability of the middle east and, potentially, the wider international community. That is not a new stance.

As I have said, there is unanimity in the House on the brutal nature of Saddam Hussein's regime. What we must now ask ourselves is whether the threat has increased in recent times. As the dossier demonstrates, we have significant evidence that Saddam Hussein has brazenly flouted United Nations resolutions—resolutions to which he agreed to adhere after the Gulf war in 1991. He has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons; tried covertly to acquire technology and matérials that could be used in the production of nuclear weapons; sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa, despite having no active civil nuclear programme that would require it; recalled specialists to work on his nuclear programme; commenced a comprehensive weapons development programme across a range of capabilities to deliver his future and current weapons of mass destruction; and there is clear evidence that he has used his experience of previous UN weapons inspections and already begun to conceal sensitive equipment and documentation in advance of the inspectors' return.

With such evidence, I am surprised that there are hon. Members who continue to argue that Saddam Hussein does not now pose an increased threat both to the stability of the middle east and on a wider international scale. I fear their opinion is based more on an entrenched position than on a cool analysis of the facts.

Of course, how we deal with the new threat level remains at the heart of today's debate. The Prime Minister made clear in his opening statement the Government's approach to the way forward. Over the years, we have consistently supported the various UN resolutions targeted at the removal of Saddam's WMD capability, which if implemented could have helped in bringing Iraq back into the international fold. Year on year, Saddam Hussein has ignored each of those constructive approaches. There are 14 different UN demands on the issue of weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein is in breach of all of them.

I have no doubt that the country at large will recognise why we have to confront this issue with a new determination. By all means every effort must be made to achieve a diplomatic solution—indeed, that must be our

prime driver—but, as the Prime Minister made clear, the choice is Saddam's: he can comply willingly or be forced to comply. There is no middle way. The threat has to be removed or it will continue to grow.

Several hon. Members have expressed doubts about our course of action. They should ask themselves this: if there is a new UN resolution and mandate, will they support it or will they find some other reason, some other excuse, to oppose the international resolve to deal with Saddam Hussein? If they support it, how do they envisage its being effectively enforced?

Those are fundamental questions, and I have heard nothing in the debate from the doubters to suggest that they have faced up to the answers.

Mr. Dalyell *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Main Question put accordingly:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Tellers for the ayes to be counting out the Aye Lobby and for the Tellers for the noes to be counting out the No Lobby?

Mr. Speaker: It is not quite in order, but I wonder why the hon. Gentleman has raised the point of order.

Mr. Hughes: As a former Whip, it is not difficult for me to notice that both the no Tellers are counting out the No Lobby and that both the aye Tellers are counting out the Aye Lobby.

Mr. Speaker: Given that the Tellers are rather new and inexperienced, I suggest that the hon. Gentleman let me use my discretion in this matter. Accuracy is what is most important.

Mr. Hughes: Can we rely on the fact that the figures declared will be accurate?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that we can.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman should come closer to the Chair.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are aware, as we all are, of the matter of precedents in the House. Although I am sure that, on this occasion, you and the House may be prepared to accept the integrity of the process, even though our normal procedure for counting votes is not being adhered to, you may wish to give some thought to whether this creates a precedent. You may wish to give the House some guidance about the fact that, should this happen again, you might not be prepared to accept the outcome.

On this occasion you have said that you believe that there can be no querying of the Vote, despite the fact that our normal procedures are not being adhered to.

Mr. Speaker: Let me put it to the right hon. Gentleman that this evening I am worried about accuracy. There are Clerks in the Lobbies, so I am in a position to check the vote against the numbers reported by the tellers. Of course, I always have the opportunity when the House returns to clarify whether there has been accuracy in this matter.

Alan Simpson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have already made reference to the interesting configuration of those doing the counting on this vote. You will be aware that the tellers for the Ayes wanted to vote in the No Lobby, but agreed to do the telling for the Ayes in order to secure a vote. Given that many Members were uneasy about not being able to vote on a substantive motion, can you advise the House as to how we can ensure that in future at the very least we are able to vote on a technical motion?

Mr. Speaker: I am just trying to get through this evening. I am not too worried about the future.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would not the best way to resolve the matter be to have the vote again and organise the tellers in the correct place, with an Aye and a No teller together so that there would be no doubt about the vote? Could it be that this is a secret Government plot to make sure that the House does not adjourn?

Mr. Speaker: As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), the House should let me use my discretion in this matter. Will the tellers now come to the Table?

The House having divided: Ayes 6, Noes 64.

Division No. 319] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Beggs, Roy
Burnside, David
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Paisley, Rev Ian
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Trimble, Rt Hon David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kelvin Hopkins and
Mr. Paul Marsden.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Buck, Ms Karen
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Dalyell, Tam
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David
Ewing, Annabelle
Flynn, Paul
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Morgan, Julie
Perham, Linda
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis

Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Weir, Michael
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mike Wood and
Mr. Kerry Pollard.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have a statement to make. That vote has served its intended purpose, demonstrating the strength of feeling in some quarters of the House on this difficult issue, but because of the rules of the House it does not have any procedural effect. As it is now past 10 o'clock, the debate on Iraq has concluded. It is now the duty of the Government Whip to move formally that this House do now adjourn to bring the sitting to a conclusion, and I must put the Question forthwith.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved,

That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Adjourned at fourteen minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 15 October 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HSBC Investment Banking Bill [*Lords*](*By Order*)
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read a Third time tomorrow.

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

Motion made,

That Mr. John Hayes be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Mr. Peter Luff be added to the Committee.—[*Keith Hill, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Railways (Overcrowding)

1. **Mr. Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam): What measures are proposed to tackle overcrowding on the rail network. [71411]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan sets out how it proposes to achieve its objectives, including a reduction in overcrowding.

Mr. Burstow: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. Can he confirm that one of the first acts of this Labour Government in 1997 was to introduce regulations to deal with the overcrowding of chickens on our trains? Can he confirm that in the five years during which the Government have been in office they have failed to deal with the problems of overcrowding on our railway network, especially on Thameslink services through my constituency? Will he today commit to putting in place the systems that will ensure that we drive down overcrowding on our trains, so that commuters are not stuck every morning and night on what are effectively cattle-truck trains?

Mr. Darling: I agree with the hon. Gentleman to the extent that congestion on the railways, especially those in the south-east of England, is a problem. However, action is being taken to address that. Last year, 600 items of new rolling stock came on to the system and this year 800 more new carriages will be delivered. By 2005, nearly 2,800 new carriages will be delivered. In addition, the SRA is also taking action to make better use of the existing network by re-timetabling to ensure that we make sensible use of the railways. It is estimated that on some routes we will achieve 20 per cent. more capacity, which will allow more frequent and more reliable services. The railways are taking action in both investment and organisation.

The hon. Gentleman is right that extending capacity and increasing the number of routes on the Thameslink lines would be of some assistance. At the moment, the matter is still being considered as part of a planning inquiry—the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the inspector's findings—but I am anxious that we make progress to open up the network to enable more people to be carried across the city. He can be assured that the Government are taking action through the SRA and other players in the industry to improve frequency and reduce overcrowding.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My right hon. Friend will know that under the previous Government's privatisation overcrowding was explicitly excluded, but before privatisation we had some measures that could be taken to control the number of people on trains. Does he agree that overcrowding is a problem partly because too many trains are cancelled? Will he consider the franchise negotiations through the SRA with particular regard to First Great Western, which is one of the biggest offenders?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend raises several points. In relation to franchising, I hope to be able to tell the House something further in the next few weeks that will constitute a significant change to the way in which franchises are organised. I also emphasise again the point that I made to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow)—that the SRA's proposals to make better use of existing rail track will allow improved frequency and greater reliability, on the Great Western line and on others. Hon. Members will be aware that the west coast main line will now be upgraded, thanks to the significant investment that could only have been made possible by this Government. That will allow greater capacity, faster journey times and more train services. That will all contribute to building a far more reliable and safer railway.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Is the Secretary of State aware that cattle-truck commuting on the Kent line is now so bad that Connex South Eastern, the operator, is bringing in trains that have the seats and toilets removed to pack in more people? He has failed to recognise that the problem is not one of new trains, but of infrastructure. All the plans put forward by the SRA so far suggest no foreseeable improvement in the next five years. What infrastructure improvements can be made within the next five years to give some hope to my commuters?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman tempts me. He is absolutely right that infrastructure is one of the major

problems we face. One of the monumental failures which the hon. Gentleman's Government left was a Railtrack that was constitutionally incapable of delivering the improvements that the railway system needed.

The hon. Gentleman says that the SRA has not concentrated on the southern region. I mentioned the new rolling stock, and the SRA is bringing forward the upgrading of the power supply to lines south of the Thames. That is something which neither Railtrack nor the previous Conservative Government, during their 18 years in power, did anything about. With respect, the hon. Gentleman should think before he speaks.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to the privatised train operating companies, which are purchasing hundreds of new rolling stock items. I agree that the problems that he has discussed this afternoon were caused by decades of underinvestment in the railways by Governments of both parties, that future investment will require both public and private money, and that it is in the national interest that Network Rail be given a fair wind. We all hope that it succeeds, but tackling the long-term problem of overcrowding will require long-term planning. Given that, does the Secretary of State share my disappointment that, 25 per cent. of the way into the Government's 10-year transport plan, so many rail projects are already well behind schedule?

Mr. Darling: Yes I do, as I said last week when we announced the plans to upgrade the west coast main line. It would have been far better if the industry had got a grip on the costs and had fully understood the sheer scale of the projects that it has to undertake.

As the parties are in the mood to be nice and not nasty, I shall agree with the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) that the fault does not lie exclusively with either Railtrack or the former Conservative Government. We are dealing with decades of underinvestment and a failure to grasp the sheer scale of what needed to be done. The hon. Gentleman's Government yielded to a temptation to which, to be frank, most Governments have yielded—that is, to live off investment made in Victorian times rather than to produce new investment as needed.

I remind the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale—and this is a difference between the parties—that the Government have allocated some £64 billion for investment in the railways. As I understand it, it remains Conservative party policy not to match that investment. If a Conservative Government were ever returned to power, the money for investment would simply not be available, and we would be back to the bad old days. I do not like to inject a note of nastiness into the proceedings—I prefer to regard it as injecting a note of reality into what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Collins: Perish the thought that the Secretary of State could ever be nasty, but, given that he is talking about long-term investment plans, what does he have to say about the announcement made a few weeks ago by the Government's own Rail Regulator? The regulator stated that the Government's plans mean that Network Rail faces a "significant risk" of running out of money in the next two years. What is the right hon. Gentleman's response to that, and what will he do about it? Does he think that simply raising the access charges for the train operating companies will provide the whole answer?

Mr. Darling: The Rail Regulator made those remarks in the context of announcing the interim review of access charges that he decided to undertake following the establishment of Network Rail. However, all parties must face up to the inescapable fact that the cost of rebuilding the railway and making it reliable and safe is far greater than, I suspect, anyone realised in the past. The difference now is that the SRA, Network Rail and the train operating companies are working together rather than against each other, which unfortunately was how they spent much of the 1990s. They are getting to grips with the big infrastructure problems. As I said earlier, they are making better use of the capacity of the line, so that they will be able to get more trains running more frequently.

There will be a cost, and in the end political parties and Governments must decide whether they are willing to meet that cost and put the railways into a state in which they are fit for the 21st century. I am in no doubt that we can build a railway service that is more reliable and safe, but the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale is right to draw attention to the fact that the costs will be substantial.

South-East Manchester Multi-modal Study

2. **Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): If he will make a statement on progress on the South-East Manchester multi-modal transport scheme. [71413]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): We announced in March 2002 our endorsement of the recommended strategy of the south-east Manchester multi-modal transport study and asked the delivery agencies to develop the elements of the strategy in more detail. An implementation group has been established and progress is being made.

Mr. Stunell: I thank the Minister for his reply and for the prompt and positive start that has been made on implementing the study. He will be aware of the importance to my constituency of the Hazel Grove bypass, which is part of the integrated transport package. Will he agree to meet a deputation from Stockport to see whether ways can be found to take advantage of the consents granted at the original public inquiry a decade ago, so that time is not lost, public money is not wasted and, more to the point, the scheme is not delayed?

Mr. Jamieson: I note the hon. Gentleman's welcome not only for the multi-modal study but for the Government's swift action in looking at the plan. I am sure that he also welcomes the extra funding that we have made available through the local transport plans in his area and the £9 million that was made available to Manchester and Cheshire to take forward some of the initial programme of work in the scheme.

The hon. Gentleman will know that there are problems with the road that he mentioned because of the planning inquiry conducted at the time by the Highways

Agency and through the Secretary of State. The road has now been detrunked and I accept that there are some problems with going through the whole procedure again.

I met a cross-party group from Stockport when I was in the area in April. If the hon. Gentleman wants to bring another cross-party group to talk with me about these concerns, I shall of course be delighted to meet both him and them.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): In essence I support the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell). Would the Minister be happy for a Cheshire Member to be included in this deputation, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne)? Although in my area there is some difference regarding the improvements that are required, does the Minister believe it right that the Macclesfield silk road, which is a wonderful dual carriageway, should, between Macclesfield and Poynton, become a single carriageway with just some on-line improvements, to link up with the Poynton bypass which is also a single carriageway and would link up with the Manchester airport eastern link road? Does he accept that SEMMMS is dealing with the country's road requirements for 2021 onwards, while the Government's recommendations do not even deal with the roads that are required today?

Mr. Jamieson: I am not quite sure which Cheshire Member the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir N. Winterton) had in mind for me to meet, although I would be happy to meet the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) as well.

The multi-modal studies were established to enable local authorities to work closely with each other and the other delivery agencies—the Strategic Rail Authority, the Highways Agency and the Government office in the area—to come up with solutions that were based on local knowledge. On the road to which the hon. Gentleman refers, the recommendation came not from the Government but from local groups that know the situation in the area. I appreciate his point about inward development, prosperity in the area and the need for those road links, but I reiterate that those proposals came not from the Government but from his own area, perhaps from some of his own councillors. He may want to use some of his energies and efforts to address matters locally. If he wants to join in discussions about it, I say the more the merrier.

Trans-European Networks

3. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): What recent discussions he has held with his European counterparts on the development of trans-European networks. [71414]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I have met my European counterparts at four Transport Council meetings over the past year, and on each occasion the future development of the trans-European transport network has been discussed. In that time I have also met Transport Ministers from Italy, Denmark and the Netherlands bilaterally, and each time the network was included in our discussions.

Mr. David: I thank the Minister for that response. He will of course acknowledge the importance of trans-European networks for Britain and for the European Union as a whole. However, agreement was not reached at the last Transport Council meeting on the new list of specific projects under trans-European networks. Can the Minister give the House an assurance that at the next Transport Council meeting on 5 and 6 December, British interests will be firmly upheld?

Mr. Spellar: They certainly will, but as my hon. Friend will know, the question of further routes under the TENS programme is also being addressed by the Transport Ministers Council, as is the percentage of grant that will go to those programmes and the overall size of the budget. Therefore, all those factors must be reconciled. It was not possible to do so at the last Transport Council meeting, but I know that the Commission and the presidency will be working hard to get agreement for the December Council.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The west coast main line is part of the trans-European network of railway lines. Given that last week the Secretary of State was unable to say how much of the money for the much-needed improvements on that line was to come from the private sector and how much from the public sector, will the Minister at least tell the House whether he anticipates that any money for those improvements will come from the European Union? On the private sector money, given that the Government have rejected Liberal Democrat proposals for the future of Railtrack, is it not the case that another Liberal Democrat proposal on the use of bonds is about to be adopted?

Mr. Spellar: It is always interesting to receive Liberal Democrat proposals, even when they are multitudinous and varied, come from all parts of the Liberal Democrat party and are often inconsistent and incompatible, as we see with monotonous regularity in the House on roads programmes. To return to railways, part of the Secretary of State's answer was that until we know the outcome of the Rail Regulator's review on track access charges, we will not know the balance of funding that will go into the west coast main line in the long term. What we do know is that getting a grip of the management of that programme—having a longer period of closures on certain sections of the line to improve it—will bring it forward by about two years. That is making considerable progress. On the final point, the hon. Gentleman should not believe everything he reads in the newspapers.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): During the long periods of closure on the west coast main line, what steps are the Government taking to ensure that there is additional capacity on alternative routes and on domestic flights into Manchester airport in particular?

Mr. Spellar: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has looked carefully at the plan, given the location of his

constituency, and will realise that the Strategic Rail Authority has put considerable effort into ensuring continuing access to Manchester and the surrounding area, consistent with making a step change in the time scale of the project and its cost. I am sure that the SRA will be willing to engage with him on particular rail issues on behalf of his constituents. On aviation, obviously he may wish to take up that matter with Manchester airport and, indeed, the operators that operate out of there. If the hon. Gentleman is going to lobby for more flights, I hope that he will not then complain here about the impact of the noise on his constituents, which might qualify him for being a Liberal Democrat.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): When my right hon. Friend is discussing trans-European networks with his colleagues, does he discuss the lamentable failure of train operators that operate through the channel tunnel to honour their promise that there would be direct services beyond London to Manchester and to other cities? That is still an outstanding demand. It is right and proper that there should be services to the great cities of this country, to link them to the great cities of the rest of Europe.

Mr. Spellar: I fully understand my hon. Friend's concerns and the concern that has regularly been raised from the regions. Given the lamentable state in which the railways were left by the previous Administration, we must have a list of priorities for investment. The number one priority for his region is the completion of the west coast main line and improving that important artery for rail traffic and for the north-west.

A1

4. **Mr A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): If he will make a statement about the A1 multi-modal study. [71415]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): We are currently considering the recommendations of the A1 multi-modal study. We will make a statement once we have fully considered all the issues.

Mr. Beith: In considering the issues, will the Minister take account of the views of most of the local authorities and the general public that the failure of the study to recommend dualling of the A1 right up to the border will leave a serious gap in the road system? Head-on collisions regularly take place on that road and at least one of the vehicles involved has usually just travelled a long distance on dual carriageway. Is the right hon. Gentleman also aware that there is considerable scepticism that the promised train improvements will ever take place or will be sufficient to meet the needs of people living in areas such as Belford or Widrington, which are not specifically included?

Mr. Spellar: All the multi-modal studies have to weigh up the balance within the regions and, nationally, we must consider how those fit together. The right hon. Gentleman will be fully aware that the north-east will benefit considerably from the widening of the A1 further south in Yorkshire and into Northumberland, which, although it is not in his region, will be be of considerable benefit to the north-east. Beyond that, the multi-modal study had to look at the volume of traffic being carried and also—another important consideration—the road safety aspects.

The right hon. Gentleman is right: there have been comments from some local bodies, but many local authorities and other interest groups in the region were involved in the study group, as indeed they have been in all other regions. We are evaluating the study, both internally for the north-east and as regards other investment across the country, to see how it fits into the national transport network. I shall take the right hon. Gentleman's views into account as we undertake that evaluation.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): I will buy the Minister a pint in the bar tonight if he can give me a comparable example of two major neighbouring cities the size of Newcastle and Edinburgh that are not linked by dual carriageway. We all know about multi-modal rubbish, but I remind the Minister that people who use roads such as the A1 are not computers—so will he review the position with a view to throwing the study in the bin and getting a proper road between Edinburgh and Newcastle, instead of linking them, in some parts, by no more than a glorified country lane?

Mr. Spellar: Ah well, I will be buying my own pint again tonight.

My hon. Friend will be aware that there is another party to the discussion—the Scottish Executive. They will have views about the priority among Scotland's roads that they give the A1 from the border up to Edinburgh.

A number of road schemes have already been developed. Other multi-modal studies will be coming in. I have already mentioned the widening of the A1 to motorway standard going up to the north-east. I also made an announcement recently about the dualling of the A66 from the north-west to the north-east. Those are major schemes and the proposals have to be evaluated. To some extent that is what the local organisations represented on the study group were doing.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): May I draw the House's attention to my declaration of interest in the Register of Members' Interests?

I welcome the conclusion in the multi-modal study that the A1 will be made up to motorway status between Bramham and Barton. Does the Minister join me in regretting that it will be a full seven years at least before that road is built? Will he give a commitment to the House today that there will be a moratorium on the building of motorway service stations on that stretch until we know exactly where the new motorway will be?

Mr. Spellar: I would point out to the hon. Lady that, when in government, her party removed a number of the powers in respect of motorway service station location and allowed motorway service operators to make their own bids. Of course, if that question was a bid for us to change that particular legislative position we might have a look at it.

As regards the time taken to build the road, a key issue for the highways authorities—especially with any major widening project—is that, for understandable reasons, they want to do only so much at any one time, precisely because of the inevitable delays for on-going traffic. It is much easier when building a new road, such as the Birmingham northern relief road: widening an existing highway is a different issue. We are, therefore, trying to speed up the process, partly in the time taken by planning but also by estimating and engineering work. We are doing much of that work in parallel, rather than taking one step after another. That is compressing the time between making a decision to build a road and actually opening that road. As the hon. Lady knows, we have also been looking at how we can improve planning, while maintaining the proper right of people to lodge objections and taking into account environmental impact assessments. We are considering whether that needs to take so much time and how we can compress it. We have made some progress but we still have a way to go and we are working on that.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): May I add my support to the points that have been made about the A1 north of Newcastle? There is also a very serious problem on that road around the Tyneside conurbation, and specifically on the Gateshead western bypass. Although I welcome the fact that the proposal to relieve that problem by building another bypass through Gateshead's green belt has now been dropped from the plan, there is still a growing problem on that road—a serious problem, which is getting worse week by week. The road is very often brought to a standstill because of the congestion. I ask my right hon. Friend to look at that as a matter of urgency, and also particularly to look at the imaginative proposals of Gateshead council to relieve congestion on that road.

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend has indeed raised this matter with me before. I undertake to have a further look at the new proposals, which he has just mentioned, and come back to him with a reply.

Road Charging

5. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): What recent meetings he has had with interest groups about proposed road user charging. [71416]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): I have had a number of meetings to discuss road user charging with the British Chambers of Commerce, the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is the Secretary of State aware that the London chamber of commerce insists that road user charges should be introduced only after there has been a measurable improvement in public transport in London? Is it not the case that that has not happened since the right hon. Gentleman's Government came to power, or his erstwhile colleague the present Mayor took office? Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to review the situation? We have enough taxes on businesses and individuals in London already, and is not the deal very poor, inasmuch as in the first year of operation road user charges will cost £200 million to introduce, whereas the income will be £130 million? It would be much better to put the £200 million into the tube system now.

Mr. Darling: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that before any charging is introduced public transport must be improved. Although I have many differences with the Mayor of London, the one thing that is clear is that he has put more money into public transport, particularly buses, and bus usage in London is increasing. The congestion charging scheme in London is a matter for the Mayor of London, and the Mayor alone. The Government have no jurisdiction over it. However, any congestion charging scheme must have clear and deliverable objectives, it must be designed to cut congestion, pollution and accidents, it must be a workable scheme and the consequences of its introduction must be properly thought out. There also needs to be general public acceptance of the scheme. It is for the Mayor to satisfy himself on those points.

The final thing that I would say to the hon. Gentleman, who I think is trying to tackle this matter in a reasonable way, is that those people in London who have concerns about the scheme should also ask themselves what measures they would adopt to reduce congestion. The Tory party has no such suggestions at all.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): The Secretary of State really cannot be allowed to wash his hands of this. He is the Secretary of State for Transport, so what is he going to do to stop the dictatorship of Transport for London? Residents are beginning to feel completely powerless; they are not listened to. As for the likely effects of congestion charging in my area, every single school that is within the congestion charging zone is already being told by teachers that they plan to leave because they are not prepared to pay £1,000 extra every year. Those are people who have travelled into the area for many years. I appeal to the Secretary of State—he cannot afford to wash his hands of this matter. He must intervene and do something for the people of London.

Mr. Darling: The Secretary of State can do many things, but he cannot act outwith his powers. Whether my hon. Friend likes it or not, Parliament decided to devolve to the Mayor of London powers in relation to transport. Whether we like it or not—and I do not and I do not think that my hon. Friend does—the good people of London decided to elect the present Mayor. I do not suppose that she supported him any more than I did, but the fact is that this is the Mayor's responsibility. I have told the House that I believe that any congestion scheme must have clear objectives, must be workable and should command broad support. It is a consequence of devolution that these powers have gone to the Mayor of London. It is for the Mayor of London to make them work. Although I fully understand my hon. Friend's point of view because I have read comments about it in the "South London Press" and elsewhere, the fact is that the Mayor must get the scheme right because it is his responsibility.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The Secretary of State says that this is a matter for the Mayor alone, but what about all those non-Londoners—the commuters who have to come into London every day—who will be made to suffer? They are not additional optional extras; they are needed in the capital to work and to make this country work. They will be suffering, and that is a matter about which the Secretary of State should be concerned.

Mr. Darling: The point that I was making is that, for the most part, responsibility for transport in London is devolved to the Mayor. It is for the Mayor to decide whether he introduces a congestion charge and, if so, in what form. I understand fully the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about people coming in and out of London, but it is not just a question of congestion charging; other measures designed to alleviate congestion on the streets of London are being taken. We discussed earlier rail improvements and other road improvements, so action is being taken across the piece to improve the situation—but the responsibility for the congestion charging scheme lies with the Mayor as a direct consequence of devolution to London.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The Secretary of State will be aware that the Select Committee is starting an investigation into road user charges. I look forward to hearing from him on that occasion. Can he confirm that he does, in fact, support congestion charging, as incorporated in the Transport Bill in 2000?

Mr. Darling: Many of us voted for that Transport Bill—now the Transport Act 2000—and I shall make my position clear. I have been very clear about the fact that measures need to be taken to tackle congestion not only in London, but in many other towns and cities in this country. Whether such measures are introduced is a matter for the local authorities concerned. That has to be the case because it must be the job of local councillors to decide what is right for their areas, but, again, I make the point that those people who say that they will have nothing to do with congestion charging, road pricing or anything like that have to consider the consequences of what they say, because the status quo of simply allowing streets which were never designed for the present volume of traffic, to become more and more clogged is simply not a realistic option. Whether or not the London scheme in particular or any other scheme that happens to come along is workable—whether it has clear objectives and is deliverable—is a matter for those charged with responsibility for introducing such schemes: the Mayor of London and councils in other parts of the country.

Road Building

7. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What recent representations he has received from the Civil Engineering Contractors Association about new road building projects. [71418]

8. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): What recent representations he has received from the Automobile Association about new road building projects. [71419]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): I have met representatives of the Automobile Association and the Motorists Forum, on which the AA is represented, to discuss road transport. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport hopes to meet the Civil Engineering Contractors Association soon.

Mr. Amess: I had anticipated that answer, but does the Secretary of State agree that, in the interests of the efficient delivery of the Government's road building programme and best value in public investment, it would be jolly helpful if there could be some indication of when there will be demand for the services of the Civil Engineering Contractors Association? So in that spirit, will he tell the House when there is likely to be an announcement of major road improvements such as those in the multi-modal integrated transport studies?

Mr. Darling: That is a very fair point, and I hope to be able to make an announcement on a number of the multi-modal schemes that are before me in the next few months.

Richard Ottaway: The Secretary of State will be aware that the A23 Coulsdon relief road in my constituency was one of the 34 projects announced by the Government in July 1998. He will also be aware that responsibility for building that road was transferred to the Mayor of London in 2000. In 2001, the Mayor said that he could not build it because the Government had not given him enough money to do so. Now that the Mayor is looking at it again, can the Secretary of State assure me that the Government will provide enough funding for that project to be built and that there will be no excuses about it being a matter for the Mayor?

Mr. Darling: I am not certainly going to get into the position where the Mayor comes to me every time that he has run out of money and says, "Please give me the money to meet all my commitments." The hon. Gentleman very fairly recognises that that road is the responsibility of Transport for London. The Government give TFL its budget—it is a significantly increased budget—but the Mayor, who is democratically elected, has to decide what are his priorities. We cannot be in a position where he simply spends the money and then comes back to the Government saying "Please pay up." No Government of whatever political colour would ever get themselves into that situation.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Is the Secretary of State aware that south-east England is chronically short of transport capacity of all kinds—railway routes and roads? Will he come to the House soon to tell us how he proposes to ease road congestion by road widening and junction improvements? Is he aware that the South East England Development Agency does not speak for people in my constituency, as it has tried to block necessary expansions of capacity and turned a blind eye

to chronic shortage and congestion? Would it not be better to abolish that body and spend the money on road improvements?

Mr. Darling: I admire the right hon. Gentleman's brass neck in many ways. It would have been nice if investment in road and rail had been sustained over the past 20 to 30 years. Many of the problems about which he and his constituents rightly complain are a result of two things. One is growing prosperity—there are more cars and more people with reasons to travel. Unfortunately, however, that comes on top of a failure of successive Governments to make the necessary investments in transport infrastructure. In relation to junctions, I hope that, if we are able to make progress, I will be able to say something that may cheer him up.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the urgent need for new road systems for east-west traffic in counties such as Hertfordshire? For instance, the M10—now about 20 years old—between the M1 and the A1 gets halfway and suddenly disintegrates, and a large number of bottlenecks occur over a five-mile stretch. Will my right hon. Friend try to ensure that east-west links are properly considered in relation to new road building?

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. I know that there is a problem with east-west links in a number of places. As I said, I hope to make announcements in the not-too-distant future following the multi-modal studies. I have noted that representations have been made not just by Labour Members but by Conservatives and Liberals, too. I hope that those representations will be as robust when the shouts of protest go up, when the decisions are made by people who hold completely different views.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Is the Secretary of State ashamed that his Government have cut investment in roads over the last five years? Last night, at the Freight Transport Association dinner, he made a welcome U-turn, recognising that congestion causes accidents, creates pollution and costs money. In the past five years, under his Government, 50 per cent. more time has been wasted by employees owing to congestion on the roads. When will the Government be able to claim that they have reduced congestion to the levels that existed in 1997?

Mr. Darling: One of the reasons why congestion was less of a problem before 1997 was very high unemployment and one of the deepest recessions that this country has ever seen, of which, if I remember rightly, the hon. Gentleman was one of the principal architects as it was his ideology that got us there. In the spirit of being nice, I am glad that he enjoyed my speech last night, in which I simply reiterated what I have been saying since I was appointed to this job in May. If he holds his horses, I will make another speech tomorrow in which I will develop those themes and my approach towards road building more fully.

Regional Development Agencies

9. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): How his Department will work with the regional development agencies in planning improvements for transport routes and systems within England. [71420]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): My Department is committed to working closely with regional development agencies to identify transport improvements that can enhance regional economic prosperity.

I am also asking the Highways Agency to press on with a package of improvements to tackle congestion and improve safety at around 90 junctions across the motorway and trunk road network in England. The package is valued at about £145 million. The agency aims to open all these schemes to traffic in the next five years. I will place a list of the junctions and a map giving their locations in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Lawrie Quinn: I warmly welcome that answer to my question. In the light of that, would the Secretary of State care to look at the Highways Agency's final strategy for the A64 corridor? Given that economic development should drive road schemes, should not schemes such as the improvements required on the A64 to the Yorkshire coast be somewhere near the top of that package in relation to the trans-Pennine routes?

Mr. Darling: I know that the A64 is currently the subject of a development agency study that will be considered by the Highways Agency. My hon. Friend is right that economic development is a consideration, but so too is the pressing need to tackle congestion and to improve road safety in different parts of the country. There are, therefore, different considerations in different parts of the country, and they all need to be addressed in their own way. Our objective is to make sure that we can build a more reliable road network that will assist and underpin our economic growth. A successful economy needs a transport system that can move people and goods around more effectively. However, we must also get our priorities right. Pollution and increasing safety, as well as economic regeneration, are also important.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): The Secretary of State will be aware that the south-east Dorset conurbation is the largest one in the south-west, yet there are no rail links between it and the Government offices in Bristol or westwards to the proposed regional seat of government in Exeter. The condition of the road links is even more parlous. Parts of the A31, A35 and A350 resemble mediaeval cart tracks, so is it not the responsibility of the regional development agency and the Secretary of State to make an effort to improve communications?

Mr. Darling: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's view. He is right to highlight the fact that in some parts of the country—parts of the south-west of England, in particular—transport links historically look to London and not, for example, to the south coast and to Bristol. He is right to suggest that such issues need to

be considered, but that will take time. However, in the next few months I hope to make announcements about a number of road and rail improvements. One thing that is striking in the south-west and other areas is that for everyone who wants a road there are rather a lot of people who do not want one. [Hon. Members: "The Liberal Democrats."] Yes, the Liberal Democrats are on both sides, and usually in respect of the same road. Very often the same people say different things to different people. However, the Liberals are not the only ones to do that. All of us as motorists want to be able to drive around the country, but all of us as environmentalists and conservationists want to be absolutely sure before we give the go-ahead to road improvements.

I will consider these issues, but let no one think that that is easy. We live in an extremely overcrowded island and all these proposals are controversial. As I said, my fundamental objective is to see what we can do to reduce the amount of congestion and to improve safety. That is how I will approach the issue in the south-west of England and in other areas.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): In my right hon. Friend's dealings with the regional development agencies, what thought has he given to the Government reviewing the way in which bus services are delivered? In south Yorkshire and Doncaster, we have erratic and dirty services that are taken off on a whim. The service needs to be expanded but the money is not there. Furthermore, when will we consider the expansion of school transport as a fundamental means of reducing congestion on our roads?

Mr. Darling: I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend on that latter point. She will know that in three areas—two in England and one in Wales—FirstBus is trying out the yellow buses that are used in the United States to take children to school. The objective is to encourage children to use a dedicated bus service rather than have their parents drive them to school. The reports will not be ready until the end of next year, but the interim reports are encouraging. Therefore, I certainly want to consider such schemes and, if possible, extend them further.

On the general point about buses, the fact is that in some parts of the country bus usage has gone up quite dramatically. For example, in Oxford—where there is a good bus service and a local authority that has gone out of its way to encourage bus travel—usage has gone up by 50 per cent. In other parts of the country, the record is lamentable. Therefore, rather than embark on fresh legislation, which I suspect would lead to a degree of planning blight, my objective is to see whether we can extend what works in some parts of the country to others, so that we can make far better use of bus services and make sure that they are as reliable as other forms of transport.

Cotswold Line

10. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What plans he has to discuss the Cotswold line with the Strategic Rail Authority. [71422]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The Strategic Rail Authority has consulted on the possible combination of the First Great Western and Thames Trains franchises, which will include the Cotswold line, and will announce the outcome in due course.

Mr. Cameron: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is he aware that the Cotswold line provides a lifeline to my constituency in west Oxfordshire because it is the only significant rail service? Is he further aware that it is a single line for most of the way between Oxford and Moreton and that most rural stations have extremely short platforms that limit the number and type of services that can use them? Will he hold urgent discussions with the SRA about dualling and upgrading the line, because there is very little in the 10-year plan for people living in west Oxfordshire?

Mr. Spellar: The SRA is considering means in the existing structure that might allow it to provide an hourly service. That would be much welcomed. Indeed, it is indeed one of the demands of the partnership. The hon. Gentleman rightly identifies short platforms as a problem in a number of areas and we are looking again at cost effective ways of lengthening some platforms so that longer trains can run on many more sections of the railway.

We know from the Chiltern line, which is not too far from the hon. Gentleman's constituency, that such measures lead to a considerable increase in ridership and a sizeable modal shift. A further extension of that line in the west midlands means that it now runs from Kidderminster to London and provides a welcome service. The hon. Gentleman can see how we have managed to expand the service. The SRA is working not just with the train companies but with local councils to see how we can replicate some of those measures on the Cotswold line.

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister of State was asked—

Public Services

34. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the progress with monitoring customer satisfaction with the delivery of public services. [71403]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Thirty pieces of research were undertaken over a three-year period from 1998 through the people's panel. This research stimulated a significant increase in the amount of customer feedback collected by Departments and contributed to the reform agenda for customer-focused public service and effective allocation of public resources.

Mr. Chapman: Does my hon. Friend agree that given the levels of investment now being put into public services, people might reasonably expect to find improvements in quality, productivity and timeliness in

their delivery? What plans does he have for the benchmarking of public service standards so that people can be told effectively whether or not those are achieved?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend will be aware that benchmarking exists in a number of Departments. Perhaps the best known example is the British crime survey undertaken by the Home Office. I should also point out that the Prime Minister's recent speeches, pamphlets and comments make our determination clear to the whole country not just to put resources into public services, but to match those resources with reform and thereby achieve the productivity and efficiency gains of which my hon. Friend speaks.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Does the Minister accept that asking people whether they are satisfied or not is an important part of the process? Why do the Government persist in denying choice to the customers of public services? When will they allow patients and parents to choose to seek another source of a public service if they are dissatisfied? It is one thing to ask them: why not let them vote with their feet?

Mr. Alexander: I commend to the right hon. Gentleman the Fabian pamphlet written by the Prime Minister just before the party conferences which made clear our ambition to have not just universal provision but the customised service that the British people now desire. There is, however, a fundamental divide between those of us who want such choices within the public sector and those who would starve the public sector of the resources necessary to match the reform.

Women (Public Appointments)

36. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): What progress has been made in increasing the number of women in public appointments. [71406]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): At 31 March 2001, 34 per cent. of appointments were held by women, compared with 23 per cent. 10 years previously. This Government are committed to increasing diversity in public appointments. Each Government Department has an action plan in support of this aim.

Dr. Starkey: I welcome the progress that has been made. Obviously there is considerable room for improvement, however, because women constitute the majority sex in the country and that is not reflected in public appointments. May I suggest that a way forward might be to provide training events for people who would otherwise not consider themselves the sort to apply for public appointments? That would encourage not just women but people from other parts of the community who are also under-represented to understand what it means to be on a public body and to appreciate the skills that they might bring to it so that they are more likely to apply.

Mr. Alexander: I could not agree more. Let me point out first that a number of regional seminars have been held to encourage women to apply for public appointments to ensure that there is balanced coverage across the country. In addition, in the coming days the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will host a specific seminar on the opportunities for women from ethnic minorities to participate fully in public bodies. I certainly welcome that initiative, which shows the direction that the whole the policy is taking.

Broadband

37. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What progress he has made on the co-ordination of the use of broadband by Departments in providing access to Government services to the public. [71408]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): In response to a study by the Office of Government Commerce commissioned by the Prime Minister, the Government will launch the regional broadband unit later this autumn. That will aim to co-ordinate at a regional and local level broadband initiatives that support e-government initiatives.

Mr. Connarty: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I know that his attention is focused on the power of broadband. Does he concur with those who have studied the matter that the rollout of broadband, with its instant, permanent online access, is the equivalent of the infrastructure built before the industrial revolution took off? Does he agree that the Government must do more to link up all existing networks, including SuperJanet, so that everyone can have access to public services? Surely he realises that the use of television for access means that we have to link up with people in their homes to give them access, rather than have them come to us, seeking our services.

Mr. Alexander: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's knowledge of and familiarity with this issue. I recently heard him on the radio in Scotland, campaigning on the subject. We face two challenges: to extend the coverage of broadband across the country and to drive up usage levels. I am pleased that we now have 1 million broadband subscribers, but I am not satisfied. There is further work to be done, and as my hon. Friend suggests, it will support the drive towards e-enablement of government services, to which this Government are committed.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): How will rural areas get access to government services or run small businesses through broadband given the limits to BT resources and to the extent to which BT thinks that it can supply broadband through its exchanges? Are the Government expecting to rely on satellite, with higher charges and lower quality, to supply broadband in rural areas?

Mr. Alexander: No, we are not relying exclusively on satellite, although it has a contribution to make. There are now 1,117 BT exchanges enabled across the country, and homes in approximately two thirds of the country can now receive broadband services. There is no silver bullet; we need to take several different steps, which is why I commend to the right hon. Gentleman the

£30 million regional development fund established to support broadband initiatives in every region through the Department of Trade and Industry.

Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): What are the Government doing to widen access to the internet through digital TV?

Mr. Alexander: The Government have already put in place a digital TV action plan. In April the Office of the E-Envoy launched UK online interactive. Digital TV offers tremendous opportunities for government services to be accessed online and reaches a section of the community who may not have a personal computer in their home.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): How many of the 3 million broadband subscribers are in rural areas? How many of the exchanges that have changed over to broadband are in rural areas? Does the Minister share my concern that there is an impending digital divide between rural areas and the rest of the country? Will he therefore work with his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry to place an obligation on Ofcom, the new body that will regulate broadband, to ensure that all areas of the country have access to the digital revolution?

Mr. Alexander: There are a couple of ways forward. We are establishing 6,000 UK online centres, not only in urban Britain but throughout the country. I commend the Welsh Executive for their efforts in this matter. The Welsh Assembly has taken imaginative policy initiatives, and we will work not only with the DTI but with the devolved Administrations to make sure that a digital divide does not open up as this new technology becomes available.

E-government

38. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What proposals he has for e-government. [71409]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House announced the Government's proposals for e-democracy on 16 July. The aim of the policy on e-democracy is to strengthen representative democracy by the use of the internet and other communication technologies.

A copy of the consultation paper, "In the Service of Democracy", has been sent to every Member of this House and Members of the other place.

Paul Flynn: Does not e-democracy, especially in the form of MPs' websites, provide wonderful new opportunities for us to serve our constituents in direct, instantaneous ways that are particularly valuable to the housebound, the elderly and the disabled? The Government are to be congratulated on achieving 95 per cent. of their e-government targets. How much progress has been made on improving participation in voting via e-democracy?

Mr. Alexander: Again, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work. We have made significant progress, not least by allocating through the last comprehensive spending review additional resources specifically for pilots of e-voting. We face two fundamental challenges: first, progressing the work on e-voting and, secondly, facing the challenge of e-participation—how to make policy making in this country more porous and more open to contributions from a range of different sectors of society. That is why the consultation paper is so important. I believe that it will inform Government policy for years to come.

Bali

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the bombings in Bali, Indonesia.

Two bombs went off near the Sari club in Kuta, Bali, just after 11 pm Indonesian time on the night of 12 October. At the same time, a bomb exploded in Denpasar, capital of Bali, near the United States consulate, and another at the Philippines consulate in Sulawesi. The Sari club was packed with people, mainly young, enjoying themselves on a Saturday night. The attacks appear to have been timed deliberately to cause the maximum possible injury and loss of life.

First, I would like to express my deep sympathies and condolences to the families who have lost loved ones in this appalling terrorist outrage. The final toll of the dead and injured is unlikely to be confirmed for several weeks, but as of this morning more than 180 people are confirmed dead, with hundreds more injured. Many of those who died were young Australians. Up to 30 British people may have died: nine Britons are confirmed dead, with a further eight bodies yet to be identified and 13 people still missing. Eight have been medically evacuated from Bali; many more received hospital treatment at the scene. We are providing assistance, as we did after 11 September, to the relatives of British victims. That will enable those who wish to travel to Bali to do so, and we will provide help and support to them while they are there.

This was an act of pure wickedness—horrific and brutal attacks that have left hundreds of families here and all around the world in shock and grieving. Last night, the United Nations Security Council condemned the bombings in the strongest terms, calling them a threat to international peace and security. At the weekend, I spoke to Prime Minister Howard and to the Premier of Western Australia to express my condolences to them, and I will speak to President Megawati later. I have also spoken to President Bush. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke at the weekend to his Australian and Indonesian counterparts, and he is discussing the issues with Secretary of State Colin Powell in Washington today. A team of specialist officers from the Metropolitan police service anti-terrorist branch has already flown to Bali, and more are on their way. US and Australian experts are also on the scene.

I should like to place on record the Government's gratitude for the help extended by both the Indonesian and Australian authorities to all those from the United Kingdom who have been caught up in these dreadful events.

We had no specific intelligence relating to the attack in Bali. We do not yet know for certain who carried it out, but we do know that there are groups of extremists active in the region, some of which have strong links to al-Qaeda. Those groups have worked with al-Qaeda on attack plans in the past. We know that they have tried before to carry out major terrorist atrocities in the region—for example, in Singapore last December, when a massive attack planned against targets, including the British high commission, was thwarted by the Singaporean authorities. I discussed that with the Prime Minister of Singapore when he visited London in April this year. He told me that had the authorities not discovered these plans, hundreds of people could have died.

The Indonesian authorities have been conscious for some time of the growing threat from extremists in the region. Indonesia is a secular country with a tradition of tolerance and moderate Islam of which Indonesians are rightly proud, but prior to 11 September, and especially afterwards, we identified the south-east Asian region, including Indonesia, as an area with a real and present threat from groups linked to al-Qaeda. The most prominent is Jemaah Islamiyah, which has a network stretching across a number of countries in the region, and which has to be one of the groups under most suspicion for this atrocity. We are urgently considering proscribing it under the Terrorism Act 2000.

Earlier this year, we put in place an enhanced package of counter-terrorism assistance for Indonesia, including specific programmes on intelligence, crisis management and aviation security. We also offered assistance with bomb disposal and bomb scene management training.

In June, I met President Megawati in London to discuss how we could fight terrorism in Indonesia more effectively, and we agreed to expand our existing programme further, drawing on the wide range of expertise in counter-terrorism that Britain can offer. We will do so in close co-operation with the US and Australia, as well as with the Indonesian authorities. We have also set up programmes to help other Governments in the region. In the Philippines, we are training in counter-terrorism, hostage negotiation and police investigations. In Malaysia, we are setting up training by Scotland Yard's anti-terrorism branch and in bomb disposal. We fully support the tripartite counter-terrorism agreement signed by Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines earlier this year, designed to combat money laundering, illegal border crossing and the illegal trade in arms.

Of course, since 11 September, here in Britain we have enhanced our intelligence efforts, strengthened protection against rogue aircraft and shipping, and clamped down on sources of terrorist financing. We have passed new anti-terrorist legislation. Internationally, we have put a new UN framework in place, under UK chairmanship, to ensure more effective national and international action against terrorism, and we have increased intelligence co-operation, strengthening existing partnerships and putting in place new ones across the world.

So we have had a fresh reminder, if we needed one, that the war against terrorism is not over. In the past 10 days, there have been attacks in Kuwait and in Yemen. The threat to all people at any time, at any place in the world, is real. In the end, it is not just the families now grieving for their loved ones who suffer, but the people of Indonesia, many of whom already live in poverty, who will have to face the devastating economic consequences of this attack for their country, as those bombs, and the fanatics who use them, do not discriminate between young and old, east and west, black and white, Christian and Muslim. They will kill anyone of any race, creed or colour. They respect no frontiers. They have no inhibitions in murdering the innocent—indeed they rejoice in it. Because of the way

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they work, in small cells of fanatics, and because their victims are the most vulnerable—people in a pub or a café, on a street or on holiday—discovering where and how they might strike next is hard. But the message we send out, and should send out, is once again the same—one of total defiance, of determination in the face of this evil to prosecute the fight against them the world over, until in time they are defeated: defeated, of course by intelligence, by police and even military action, but defeated also in the triumph of our values of tolerance, freedom and the rule of law over those of terror designed to produce bloodshed, fear and hatred.

Some say that we should fight terrorism alone, and that issues to do with weapons of mass destruction are a distraction. I reject that entirely. Both, though different in means, are the same in nature. Both are the new threats facing the post-cold war world. Both are threats from people or states who do not care about human life, who have no compunction about killing the innocent. Both represent the extreme replacing the rational, the fanatic driving out moderation. Both are intent not on letting people live in peace with each other, celebrate our diversity, and work out our differences in an orderly way, but on producing such chaos and disorder that out of it comes a world in which religions and nations and peoples fight each other for supremacy. That is the true measure of what is at stake. The war on terrorism is indeed a war, but of a different sort to the ones we are used to. Its outcome, however, is as important as any we have fought before.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I start by thanking the Prime Minister for his statement? I should like to join him in welcoming the swift action and help given by the Foreign Office to support the many British families who have lost loved ones in Bali over the weekend. Our thoughts and prayers are with them, as they are with all the victims' families.

If 11 September was a nightmare, the atrocity in Bali marks the moment when the world woke up to the fact that that nightmare had become a living reality. Today, more than 180 people lie dead—up to 30 Britons among them—and hundreds more are injured. They were backpackers and holidaymakers, couples on honeymoon and tourist workers—innocents in a self-styled tropical paradise who were killed by an unspeakable evil that we must face up to. Terrorism is a cancer and it must be rooted out wherever and whenever we find it. So I welcome the assistance that the United Kingdom is lending to the Australian and Indonesian authorities in their search for those responsible for the Kuta beach bombing and in their efforts to bring those people to justice.

I hope that everybody will remember that this is the second largest terrorist atrocity committed against British people—the first being the World Trade Centre. In a little over a year, more than 150 British citizens have died in those two incidents—so this is our struggle too, wherever the incidents, at home or beyond our shores. I am therefore pleased that the Prime Minister has confirmed that this latest attack has stiffened our resolve to tackle terrorism around the world.

A great deal has been done since 11 September to deal with global terrorism, even though some claim otherwise. Much of it—I hope that people will understand—necessarily has been behind the scenes. We know the benefits of international co-operation from working with countries such as Singapore and Malaysia, where recent planned terrorist attacks have been foiled with the help of UK and American intelligence. It is also worth noting that, as I understand it, the Saudi authorities have in the past couple of hours thwarted yet another attempt to hijack an airliner. So there have been successes; the events of the past weekend, however, show just how much work there is still left to do.

For some time, Indonesia has been warned by its neighbours and by the United States about the activities of terrorist cells on its soil. There were 30 bombings in Indonesia last year and an attempted attack on the US embassy in Jakarta last month. I therefore ask the Prime Minister why Jemaah Islamiyah—the group implicated in that attack—was not placed on any list of foreign terrorist organisations published by the US State Department, the European Union or the UK Government. He talked about dealing with that group, so why is he using the phrase that he is "only considering" proscribing it? Does he still lack the evidence? What links, if any, are there between that group and any organisations in the UK? Are there any provable links or any suspicion of which he is aware?

The Prime Minister has held talks with President Megawati. What steps are we taking to ensure that Indonesia deals with militant Islamic groups as effectively as its neighbours such as Singapore and Malaysia? He said that he had received no specific information about an attack in Bali, but I am aware that on Thursday the US State Department issued a general warning that all American citizens should stay away from venues such as nightclubs in certain countries. Was the intelligence that was available to the State Department when it issued that warning also available to us?

The need to root out terrorist groups is as urgent as the need to confront Saddam Hussein. I agree with the Prime Minister that there should be no doubt that it cannot be a question of either/or. I agree with him that those who say—there have been some—that we must choose between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction are offering a false choice. Bali cannot be used as a pretext for letting Saddam off the hook. Surely the duty of any British Government is to protect British citizens against all threats—not merely to give them a false choice and present them with one threat. On the contrary, just as 11 September did, this attack shows what happens when the world fails to respond to threats as they arise, giving clear signals about further and future attacks.

The war against terrorism and our determination to disarm Iraq must surely proceed in parallel. However, the British people need complete reassurance that we are capable now of doing both. Will the Prime Minister let us all know that we will make the necessary intelligence capability, manpower and equipment available, and that nothing will stand in the way of that, regardless of implications for future financial resources?

Saturday's tragic events have shown that we must be able to fight a long-term conventional war against global terrorism, even as we prepare for another form of war against Iraq. Resources must be matched to meet the threats that we face. Without that resolve, there can

be no true and lasting peace for Britain. In our defence, we must surely steel ourselves for the fact that this is now a struggle not just for a few people in distant lands, but for all of us to defend our civilised values against those who would tear them down and return us to a new dark age.

The Prime Minister: I shall respond reasonably briefly, as I obviously agree with much of what the right hon. Gentleman said. On some of the specific points, of course it is right that many attempted terrorist acts have been foiled, which is to the great credit of those who succeeded in doing so. The trouble is that the terrorists need succeed only once; that is the problem that we face.

The reason there has been hesitation in proscribing the particular organisation is indeed a lack of proof of whether it has been involved, but it is the most obvious suspect for the latest atrocity. We are considering it precisely for that reason, and we need to assess the evidence carefully. It is right to say, however, that we are aware of no connection with any group in this country.

In relation to warnings that have been given, there are two difficulties. The first is that there were no specific warnings of which I am aware in relation to the attack in Bali. What there have been, of course, are specific warnings about the potential for attacks in Indonesia. Indeed, last month the Americans and ourselves acted to protect our high commissions in Jakarta precisely because of worries about potential terrorist threats.

The difficulty—this is the second point—is that intelligence of an unspecific nature flows across our desks all the time. It is very difficult to work out what we must focus on and deal with, and what is so broad that we cannot deal with it. That is why we must take action not just on the intelligence front, but in trying to work out those groups' sources of weapons and bombs, how they are financed, the types of covert activity that give them the means to carry out such attacks, and where their sympathisers are in various parts of the world. All that must be part of how we act.

I emphasise, as I said right after 11 September and have said constantly since then, that that will take a significant time. We have dealt to a large extent with the al-Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan, but their cells remain in different parts of the world and we must go after them in each part of the world. We have discussed the matter a great deal with Indonesia, we have offered what help we can, and I know that the Americans and the Australians have done the same. The reason I had the meeting with President Megawati in London in June was to see what more we can do. We will now be looking further at what we can do.

Finally, in relation to intelligence capability, I can assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that the intelligence services will have the resources that they need to do the job that we need them to do.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I entirely associate myself and my right hon. and hon. Friends with the proper expressions of sympathy in the House this afternoon. All of us watching those awful television pictures over the past few days, particularly of the relatives making their way to Bali and trying desperately to find some information about their missing loved ones, will not have failed to realise the utter horror of what has taken place and its global unacceptability.

Does the Prime Minister agree that, in the wake of the tragedy, the international community must take stock of the campaign against terrorism? The new intelligence co-operation to which he referred this afternoon is obviously welcome, as is the deployment of forces to Indonesia and to the region. Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that in giving support to Indonesia, it is probably worth bearing in mind the fact that we want to keep the focus of that support on civilian forces and the police, rather than on the military, because there is at least the possibility of links between the army and other Islamic terrorists?

Are the Government addressing that issue in the course of their dealings with the Indonesian authorities? Obviously, they must be given every encouragement to deter future acts of terrorism, but is not one of the lessons of this outrage that we are not facing a single threat from a single enemy in a single place, and that the complex roots of terrorism mean, as the American writer, Flannery O'Connor, once put it, that

"The terrorist seeks to wash an impure world clean with the blood of innocent victims"?

Do not we need, therefore, to tackle not only the war on terrorism, as the President and the Prime Minister call it, but the other global factors that give rise to the causes of terrorism—not least, for example, poverty? Should not we again take this opportunity to reassure the law-abiding, peace-loving Muslim community both in our country and abroad that our campaign is not against them, but against the extremists who pervert their religion and principles?

Does the Prime Minister agree with former President Clinton that

"our most pressing security challenge is to finish the job against al-Qaeda"?

Does he share the anxiety expressed by European Union Commissioner Chris Patten, who said that he hopes that the efforts against Iraq do not distract us from the need for further efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan and against al-Qaeda itself?

Finally, is it the Prime Minister's assessment that, if there were a war against Iraq, it would increase or decrease the likelihood of further international terrorist incidents of the type that we have just seen?

The Prime Minister: Let me emphasise that we will offer the relatives of those who have died in this terrorist outrage all the help that we can. When they are facing a very difficult and uncertain time and are travelling to a faraway country, we must ensure that we provide absolutely every form of assistance that we can, and we will do so. Essentially, we are providing exactly the same help as we provided for relatives in the aftermath of 11 September.

In respect of Indonesia, we will work with whatever part of the Government we can and whatever forces there are in Indonesia to try to help them combat this terrorism. The right hon. Gentleman will know that I have argued long and hard—and I continue to do so—for a broader international agenda that deals with some of the issues of poverty and development in the world. However, it is important at this point and on this day in particular to make one thing clear: the terrorists carrying out these appalling acts are doing terrible damage to Muslims the world over and are killing many

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innocent Muslims. As for poverty, quite apart from the terrible loss of life in Indonesia, we can only reflect on how much poverty will be caused by the destruction of the tourism industry, certainly for the near future in Bali and possibly beyond. The situation is therefore very serious for the poorest people in Indonesia. We know from the way in which al-Qaeda operates that the people involved are not necessarily poor at all; they are often extremely well funded, but have a particular type of fanaticism that I think we must confront.

As for the issue of weapons of mass destruction or Iraq, I shall not repeat what I have already said, but I refer the right hon. Gentleman to what the Danish Prime Minister, the President of the European Union, said a moment ago in our press conference. He said that both the issues were threats and had to be tackled, and that we should show the same firmness of will in respect of both.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Will my right hon. Friend share in the sympathy for the family and friends of Mr. Ian Findley of my constituency? He was one of those who tragically lost their lives in Bali. I want to put on record my thanks and those of the family for the support that they have received from the Foreign Office. At such a difficult time for them, will my right hon. Friend give them at least the comfort that should they need financial support to return Ian's body to the United Kingdom, it will be forthcoming?

The Prime Minister: I join my hon. Friend in sending deep sympathy and condolences to Mr. Findley's family. I assure him and them that we shall give every assistance in returning his body to this country for a proper funeral. Mr. Findley's family are among many who, unfortunately, are grieving, and we shall do everything that we can to help them, as we did after 11 September.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the Prime Minister suggest to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he should hold discussions with the insurance industry, for which he has overall responsibility, about holiday insurance? Many people take out no insurance; more take out insurance that is almost useless, and some take out expensive insurance and find that the exclusions are burdensome. That will have a huge impact on not only the British insurance industry but tourism, on which so many poor people in the world depend.

The Prime Minister: I am not sure whether there is an easy answer to such questions, but I shall raise with the Chancellor the issues that the hon. Gentleman mentions.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): At the beginning of August, I led an inter-faith delegation from Parliament to Indonesia under the auspices of the Foreign Office. We specifically examined some of the problems that relate to Muslim-Christian conflict, but we also considered the wider scene. We must remember that Indonesia is a three-year-old, fledgling democracy. It is throwing off a corrupt and repressive regime and trying to establish a tolerant and just society while also dealing with unorthodox Islamic extremists. In addition to any help in finding the barbaric perpetrators of the bomb massacre in Bali, will my right hon. Friend ensure that our Government continue with the much-appreciated programmes of help and support to develop good governance, justice and inter-faith harmony, especially in places such as central Sulawesi and Maluku, where serious violence has occurred? The Bali massacre has tragically thrown all that into the spotlight.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Indonesia has escaped military rule and, as he said, is a fledgling democracy. It is tragic if its democratic stability faces another threat. We shall continue with our programmes to develop good governance. We specifically discussed inter-faith dialogue when I met the President of Indonesia in June. It is an important, long-term part of the solution.

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made a powerful point when he drew attention to the number of Britons who have been killed in the incident and others. However, the specific incident that we are discussing constituted a day of infamy especially for Australia; it is Australia's equivalent of 11 September. Will the Prime Minister be as supportive of Australia in the coming months as he rightly was of the United States after 11 September?

I have heard some people in this country argue that if Britain remained apart from the war against terrorism and from that against weapons of mass destruction, we might somehow be spared the aggression of terrorists. Does not the incident underline what many of us knew: no one will be spared in the war of aggression by terrorists, and the only answer is therefore for the world community to join the fight against terrorism?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely. On the first point, I phoned Prime Minister John Howard immediately after the incident and we not only expressed our condolences but discussed what we could to do to help. I also spoke to the Premier of Western Australia because many victims came from there. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that we will do all that we can to support Australia at this very difficult time. Australians realise, as do the British, that, in the end, there is no secure sanctuary from international terrorism, and that the only option available to us that we can possibly take with our heads held high is to be part of the coalition against international terrorism. Australia has played a magnificent part in that over the past year or so, and we must continue to be with them in that fight.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I join the Prime Minister in condemning the outrageous and barbaric act perpetrated against the young people in Bali and offer my sympathy to those left behind? In the light of this latest outrage, however, should we not be targeting all our resources and energies on fighting terrorism, rather than starting another war in the middle east? Surely the Prime Minister will agree that to start such a war would fan the flames of fundamentalism across the whole area and make matters much worse. Our priorities must be to

get the weapons inspectors back and to concentrate on getting rid of al-Qaeda. That is the way in which to protect all our citizens.

The Prime Minister: Obviously, my hon. Friend and I will not agree on all aspects of the Iraq issue, but I do agree with what she said a moment ago about our priority being to ensure that we root out terrorism wherever it is, and, through the United Nations, to achieve the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction through a proper inspections regime. That is what we are working towards. As I said in my statement, however, this is not an either/or, and we really need to tackle both these issues, as both are threats to the stability and order of the world.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): While everybody utterly deplores this wicked, cruel act of terrorism, I would like to pursue a point made by the Leader of the Liberal Democratic party, which is that it will not be sufficient for us to continue to denounce terrorism in general terms. If we are really going to grapple with the problem, we must of course use military and intelligence means, but we must also tackle its sources. They are not simply religious ones, and these acts are not organised solely by one small terrorist group. After the 1997 Asian financial crisis, Indonesia was left to wallow in chaos without the international financial organisations making any serious attempt to help, while the rest of the world humiliated Indonesia in East Timor. In those circumstances—in a country of 200 million people with a Government who are not in effective control—it is not surprising that chaos is breaking out all over that vast archipelago, and this may be only the first of many disasters.

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman on East Timor; I think that the Government took a brave and correct decision in what they did there. I do not disagree that we need a broad agenda at an international level; indeed, I have often argued for that. At this moment, however, we must be careful of saying, in effect, that these people are carrying out these attacks because of the real problems of poverty or underdevelopment in Indonesia. They are not. They are fanatics and extremists whose very acts will have brought more poverty and more underdevelopment to Indonesia. I do not disagree that it is important for the international community to give Indonesia the chance to get on its feet economically. Indeed, this country has been trying to do so; that was another thing that we discussed with the Indonesian President in June. At this moment, however, we should not mix our messages about what has happened. It is wrong and wicked, and has nothing to do with advancing any cause that any of us recognise as justified.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the horrific events of the past few days underline the fact that the fight against international terrorism must be our topmost priority? That fight depends on the broad-based coalition that he and President Bush put together after 11 September. Is it not, therefore, all the more important that my right hon. Friend get it across to President Bush that any military conflict outside the authority of the United Nations would fracture that coalition and undermine the fight against terrorism?

The Prime Minister: We do want to ensure that we have the broadest possible coalition, not just in the fight against terrorism but in dealing with weapons of mass destruction. That is what we are working for and, as my right hon. Friend rightly implies, it is important that we maximise international support. I have always said, however, that it is important that the coalition addresses both issues. As President Bush's speech the other day in Cincinnati indicated, the United States has a real desire to ensure that we have the broadest possible coalition to deal with those issues, because they are both threats to the world. Weapons of mass destruction are a real threat. In my first statement to the House on the events of 11 September, on 14 September, I specifically linked the two issues together, and I continue to do so. They are both threats of the same nature, although different in means. I agree that the best way to deal with them is on the basis of the broadest possible international support.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I associate the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru with the sympathy and condolences expressed to those who have been injured and bereaved in this atrocity. I have listened carefully to the Prime Minister, but I wonder how it could be sensible to fight a war on two fronts if any preoccupation with a military campaign in Iraq were to detract, disrupt, deflect or in any way undermine the solidarity of the international coalition against terrorism.

The Prime Minister: We have to tackle the danger, whatever its source. If the danger comes from more than one source, we have to tackle it in more than one way. It is important to recognise that both issues are threats, and I shall explain why they are linked. They are linked because the same type of fanaticism and extremism is driving both threats. They may not be directly linked at this moment, in the sense that weapons of mass destruction are in the hands of the terrorists, but I ask the House to consider whether if we allow unstable states—with oppressive and dictatorial regimes—to develop weapons of mass destruction and also allow the terrorist groups to operate, we can be confident that the two threats will not at some point come together. I think that that is a real possibility, which is why it is false and—I say this respectfully—dangerous to suggest that we somehow have a choice between dealing with the threat of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons in the hands of unstable countries and dealing with international terrorism. They are of the same nature and, unless we tackle both, they could come together at some point in a horrific way.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Does not this tragedy all too graphically remind us of the absolute importance of the international coalition against terrorism, especially the need to sustain and enhance that coalition across the countries and Governments of the Muslim world? Therefore, is it not important that we do nothing by unilateral decision or

[Mr. Chris Smith]

action, outside the institutions of the international community, that might diminish or damage that central purpose of combating terrorism?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it is important that we do not do anything that damages the international coalition against terrorism. As my right hon. Friend will accept, in many ways it is Muslim countries that have most to fear from this terrorism, but it is also important to deal with the issue of weapons of mass destruction. I have been trying to get us to deal with that also on a broad basis of international support, and I am confident that in the end we will get that support. Our use of the international coalition must allow us to tackle and deal with those problems, not be a means to avoid dealing with them.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The Prime Minister knows the support that exists among Conservative Members for his sentiments and for the difficult course that he has set. However, will he deal with the very real deficiencies hampering our armed forces in the challenge that they face? The regular Army shrank again last year, there are 7,000 personnel unfit for military duty, reserves are at an all-time low and another RAF squadron has closed because of a lack of pilots. I urge the Prime Minister to accept that, in the difficult time ahead, we owe it to our armed forces to tackle those problems.

The Prime Minister: There are, and always will be, matters that need to be addressed in respect of our armed forces. However, let me point out that defence spending is now rising, after falling in real terms for many years. We take very seriously matters that arise in connection with our armed forces' equipment or capability, but their commitment and capability are renowned and well regarded the world over.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): As someone with one foot in this country and the other in Australia, may I associate myself especially with the remarks that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made about the victims of the tragedy, and their relatives and friends?

I am concerned about the moneys flowing to terrorists. Earlier this year, the UN convention on the suppression of the financing of terrorism came into force. All countries are obliged to take action, as this country has done. What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the actions taken by other countries?

The Prime Minister: The truthful answer is that those actions have been mixed. There have been real successes in the action taken against money laundering, and there is real evidence that that activity is being disrupted. However, it is worth pointing out that there is always a tremendous will to take action in the immediate aftermath of very serious incidents. We in this country have introduced legislation but, surprising as it may seem, people's memories fade in a short space of time. Subsequently, there are many arguments about whether action should be taken against money laundering or against terrorist groups, and so on. Once again, we have been reminded that we need to take action at a national and an international level.

The honest answer to my hon. and learned Friend is that real progress is being made. However, I agree, as his question implied, that a lot more could be done.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Clearly, I do not know whether the estates of any of those who met untimely deaths in Bali this week or in the United States last year are liable to inheritance tax, but will the Prime Minister and the Chancellor consider exempting any estate that is so liable?

The Prime Minister: I simply do not know the answer to that. I shall look into the matter and write to the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The outrageous atrocity against innocent people carried out on Saturday night should help to concentrate our minds. Two things are essential: we must maintain the coalition that involves the US, the UK, Russia and the Muslim countries in an alliance against international terrorism, and we must not give any comfort to al-Qaeda and the international terrorists. If we were to take military action in the light of recent events involving Iraq, does my right hon. Friend agree that we would be acting as a recruiting sergeant for the international terrorists whom we must defeat?

The Prime Minister: Again, let me say that it is important that we maintain the international coalition, but we should not underestimate the knowledge among Arab and Muslim countries of the dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction. After all, the two countries that have suffered most from Saddam are Iran and Kuwait. However, I agree with what my hon. Friend said. I make the point again that it is important that we have the broadest possible international coalition, but I think that we can, and should, deal with both issues.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): In recent years, I have spoken in the House about the often very violent attacks suffered by minority communities in Indonesia, to which the military appears to have turned a blind eye. Those attacks have received very little publicity because local people rather than Europeans were involved. Is the Prime Minister worried about the profound sense of alienation from western values that exists in many Muslim societies? That alienation often reaches right to the top of society.

Given the Prime Minister's experience with Northern Ireland, does he agree that we must root out, through military and intelligence means, both terrorism and its causes? In other words, will he be—to coin a phrase—tough on terrorism, and tough on the causes of terrorism?

The Prime Minister: I agree, certainly, that we should not simply try to deal with this by means of intelligence. I also agree that there is a lot of anti-west feeling in many parts of the Arab and Muslim world—there is no point in denying that. Our response must surely be twofold. First, we must deal with issues where a reasonable point is being made. Many people feel, and have felt on many occasions, that it is important to show the same rigorous concern for dealing with all the issues of conflict around

the world as we have shown, for example, in the coalition against terrorism. However, we must also confront extremism and fundamentalism where they effectively mean that people are, as they were in Afghanistan, forced to live in a state of abject repression or where they try to justify terrorism. I do not believe that those things genuinely have anything to do with the true voice of Islam, and I think that the majority of Muslims feel the same.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Is not the price of freedom eternal vigilance, and is not the fact that so many young lives have been lost a reminder of that dire statement?

The House will welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that the United Nations Security Council has passed a further resolution condemning the bombings and also that there is co-operation within the framework of the United Nations to attack global outreach terrorism. However, will he confirm that in the association with Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom in Bali, there can be co-operation outside the United Nations as well as within it? Finally, will he tell the House where we are with the United Nations resolution on Iraq?

The Prime Minister: On my hon. Friend's latter point, we are pursuing it and I hope and believe that we can achieve a consensus on it. On his first point, he is right that we must work with the authorities in Indonesia as well as the Australians and Americans to do everything that we can to counter the terrorist threat. I can assure him that we are doing that.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On behalf of the Unionist Members and the great majority of the people of Northern Ireland, may I express sympathy to those in Australia and in other parts of the world who have suffered in this appalling tragedy? Regrettably, there has been a sense of denial at various levels. In May this year, I asked in the House about links with al-Qaeda. At the time, there was no knowledge of any, but some of us were aware of them. When we were in Indonesia, we discovered that that was the name that they dared not speak. In other words, they were aware of the issue but not prepared to face it.

Dropping the word "international" from terrorism is a blessing, because we must realise that terrorism is homespun as well as international. Therefore, we join the Prime Minister in his leadership to deal with terrorism whence it comes. Regrettably, for example, in Northern Ireland, in the fight against organised crime, there seem to be delays between the Home Office and the Northern Ireland Office in putting into action some of the things that are needed and were agreed to earlier.

The statement from the Security Council on terrorism is to be welcomed. I trust that it will be equally united not only in putting forward a statement but in recommending action to deal with terrorism, whether it is in the form of weapons of mass destruction or the car bombs that plague our communities. We will back it.

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support on the statement. What he says is right: we must deal with this issue whatever its source and origin. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will make a statement on Northern Ireland shortly.

Northern Ireland

4.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about Northern Ireland.

As the House knows, over the past weeks and months the political process in Northern Ireland has encountered increasing difficulties. I do not need to remind the House of the magnitude of the project on which we are embarked in Northern Ireland, nor that in any great historic process of this kind, there will inevitably be setbacks and difficulties.

My sincere hope, therefore, was that we would be able to overcome those latest challenges in the short term. That is why the Prime Minister and I have had intensive discussions in recent days with the Northern Ireland political parties and the Irish Government. However, it became clear that an impasse had been reached and that decisive action was needed to safeguard the progress made and tackle the remaining challenges. Because of the difficulties that we have encountered, yesterday I made an order under the Northern Ireland Act 2000 suspending devolved government in Northern Ireland. It came into effect at midnight yesterday. I said yesterday that I regretted that that had become inevitable. The real losers here are the ordinary people of Northern Ireland—those who appreciate and deserve local decisions being made by local politicians to improve the lives of local people, not least because the devolved Administration have achieved so much on their behalf and in their interest.

I take this opportunity to pay warm tribute to the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and his predecessor, their ministerial colleagues and the Assembly Members themselves for all that they have done in a relatively short period to improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland and to express the hope—I do very much hope this—that the devolved institution can be restored quickly.

I stress that that impasse affects only one aspect of the Belfast agreement, albeit an important one. As the joint statement by the Prime Minister made clear, this Government remain totally committed to the full implementation of the agreement. It has already brought great benefits to the people of Northern Ireland.

In their statement yesterday, the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach also recognised that the recent difficulties in Northern Ireland stemmed from a loss of trust on both sides of the community. There has been much apportioning of blame already and there is no doubt that there is a lack of confidence on both sides of the community. At the heart of the recent political difficulties, however, have been concerns about the commitment to exclusively democratic and non-violent means.

Let us be clear, lest anyone should think that we do not take a balanced view, that we have seen violence from all sides of the community, including a campaign, sometimes murderous in its intent and effect, from the so-called loyalist paramilitaries. Let it be equally clear that the Chief Constable and I are combating and will combat that violence with all the means at our disposal, wherever it happens and whoever is behind it. We will go where the evidence leads. That is why I recently redoubled our efforts by setting up, in addition to the organised crime taskforce, the law and order action group, which brings together the key agencies to strengthen our drive against all forms of racketeering and violence from wherever they may come. In that context, I have to tell the House that an arrest was made this morning in connection with the shooting of Danny McBrearty in Londonderry on 29 September. Police inquiries are continuing and will continue into that violent act as well.

I have absolutely no doubt that episodes such as the trial of republicans in Colombia and the break-in at Castlereagh have seriously damaged confidence in the power-sharing arrangements. It would, of course, be entirely improper for any of us, not least a Minister of the Crown, to prejudge the outcomes of any cases involving outstanding criminal charges. However, it would be naïve of any of us to ignore the impact on political and public opinion of the recent charges brought against republicans, including members of Sinn Fein, as a result of the police operation on 4 October.

Like me, the House will be particularly concerned about the position of prison officers and others and their families, for whose assistance the police have now established a special unit. The Prison Service is working closely with the police and has established a helpline to that end.

Let me say to the House that there can be no authority, no legitimacy, no morality and no political basis for anyone, in today's Northern Ireland, to have recourse to violence or paramilitary activity. Whatever may have happened 30 years ago, or 300 years ago, in today's Northern Ireland the path to power through democracy is open to everyone and the path of violence is illegitimate for anyone. It is also essential, as the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach noted, that each community has confidence in the commitment of the other to the agreement.

That is now the challenge that faces us. Yesterday was, perhaps not surprisingly, filled with recrimination. Today and the days beyond that should be about rebuilding: but that rebuilding has to be on foundations that are firm, sound and lasting. It is against this background that the Prime Minister and Taoiseach said yesterday that

> "it must be clear that the transition from violence to exclusively peaceful and democratic means, which has been ongoing since the Agreement, and indeed before, is being brought to an unambiguous and definitive conclusion".

In their statement, they also said:

> "It is now essential that the concerns around the commitment to exclusively democratic and non-violent means are removed. The time has come for people to clearly choose one track or the other"—

in Northern Ireland.

We face some difficult and challenging weeks ahead. Our task is threefold. First, we need to move rapidly and decisively from the recent weeks of political uncertainty. I have no doubt that the people of Northern Ireland—who should always be at the front of our minds in all that we are doing—welcome, appreciate and deserve devolved government. Like them, I would have much

preferred devolved government continuing, with local Ministers making local decisions. But until it can be restored, my colleagues and I will dedicate ourselves to working for the good of all the people of Northern Ireland to the best—the very best—of our abilities.

In the meantime, we shall carry on the process of government in Northern Ireland proactively, in the interest of all its people. This cannot be a matter of mere care and maintenance. We owe it to the people of Northern Ireland that effective government should be moved forward. We shall not duck the difficult issues. We shall be able to build on the progress made by the devolved Administration in many areas, taking careful account of the "Programme for Government" and the principles of reinvestment and reform on which it is based and which the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have supported. I met both of them yesterday to begin to discuss some of those matters.

The Policing Board is widely agreed to have been one of the finest achievements of the agreement. I want its work to continue. The House will recall that it was the first time in our history that there was a cross-community, elected policing board. I have invited all the existing board members to continue providing their excellent service to the community. I sincerely hope—as I know the House will, too—that they will all accept reappointment.

In this context, I also welcome two new members of the ministerial team. I am making available separately the details of ministerial appointments under suspension. In broad terms, the Minister of State's additional responsibilities will focus on education and those of the Under-Secretary of State on social issues, including health. The portfolios of the new Ministers, my hon. Friends the Members for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) and for Basildon (Angela Smith), will centre respectively on economic affairs and environmental issues. Our first task is the good governance of Northern Ireland.

Secondly, under the terms of the agreement, we need to embark on a process of review. I shall be in touch with the parties and the Irish Government as to how that should be taken forward. I want to stress that this is an impasse—hopefully short-lived—in only one aspect of the agreement. It is not the whole agreement and it is not the whole peace process. We will continue, in co-operation with the parties and our colleagues in the Irish Government, to carry forward that process and the implementation of the agreement.

Thirdly, with reference to the problems underlying the present suspension that I mentioned earlier, we will bend every effort to find a basis on which to bring back the devolved institutions, and as quickly as possible. The role and the responsibility of the political parties in achieving that are vital. It is our aim to find a basis on which all the institutions of the agreement can be brought back into operation as soon as possible. The election date scheduled for 1 May stands and is not altered by yesterday's decision.

These, then, are the three priorities: the good governance of Northern Ireland, carrying forward the agreement and addressing the present impasse. They will inform the approach of the Government over the coming weeks and months. In those tasks, we will call upon the co-operation and support of the House, of the parties, our colleagues in the Irish Government and those far beyond our shores, such as the President and people of the United States, who have been unstinting in their support for this historic project.

I can promise the House that, for our part, we will bear ourselves with determination and endurance, because we recognise that the magnitude of the prize that we seek is commensurate with the challenges that we face.

We have come an enormous distance in recent years. The peace process and the agreement have increased prosperity, revitalised society, safeguarded rights and, above all, saved numerous lives. I am determined that those benefits should not be lost, but should increase. The agreement will remain the template for political progress in Northern Ireland. I hope that the decision that I took yesterday and I have explained to the House today creates a breathing space—a chance to gather strength—before that progress moves forward once again.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I should like to thank the right hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving me an advance copy of his statement. I should also like to congratulate, on behalf of the Opposition, the two new Ministers who have joined his team—the hon. Members for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) and for Basildon (Angela Smith). I should also like to endorse his appreciation, which we strongly share, of the great efforts that have been made by so many people in Northern Ireland to make a success of devolution: the First Minister and the Members of the Executive—except for the Sinn Fein Members who are responsible for today's setback—and the Members of the Assembly and so many people throughout Northern Ireland. It is a very disappointing day for all of us—for us in the House, but for the people in Northern Ireland in particular.

We can only hope that this setback—the Secretary of State was right to use the word "setback"—is only temporary, and I hope that the political process and devolution can be restored as soon as possible. I should also like to extend our congratulations to the Chief Constable on the prompt and effective actions of the police over the past few weeks, and it is very good news—I strongly support what the Secretary of State has decided in this matter—that the police board has been asked to continue. I also share the right hon. Gentleman's relief that an arrest has been made in connection with the shooting of Mr. McBrearty in Londonderry a few weeks ago.

Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge, however, that we have made it clear—I to him in private and several of us in public—that we do not share the Government's view that suspension of the institutions is the right response to this crisis? Suspension amounts to penalising the innocent—indeed, the whole peace process—because of the misbehaviour of one party. That seems perverse, and to take risks with the whole process, which we find unnecessary and undesirable. Our strong preference was to exclude the guilty party, which is—although I notice that the Secretary of State still does not quite want to use the words—Sinn Fein-IRA, by taking powers in the House to enable the Secretary of State to exclude any party in breach of its obligations, and we argued very forcefully for that in the

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

debate that we had in this Chamber in July. Is it not very regrettable that the Government took no notice of those arguments and that when the latest crisis broke that power was not in the Government's armoury at all?

The Secretary of State, of course, took the line in July that the mechanism of an exclusion motion in the Assembly, not his taking the power in the House to exclude, was quite adequate for the purpose, and he promised to introduce such a motion in the event of another Sinn Fein-IRA breach. Let me quote the right hon. Gentleman's words precisely:

"In circumstances in which I decided that the IRA had broken the ceasefire, I would be ready to use that power, and to place such a motion before the Assembly to require it to address the matter."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 992.]

Why did he not fulfil that promise yesterday instead of suspending? Is it not rather destructive of confidence on the part of all concerned, particularly those who have to deal with the Secretary of State, that he should promise to adopt a particular course in a given eventuality in July and do something quite different when that eventuality duly presented itself in October?

Our responsibility is now to make the best of the situation, to contribute to ensuring that the governance of Northern Ireland from Whitehall and Westminster is as effective as it can be and to bring back devolution as soon as possible. We are absolutely committed to that objective, and I shall ask a number of practical questions on that in a moment. But does the Secretary of State not agree that it would be quite remiss of Parliament to brush over this dramatic reversal without asking some of the essential questions that arise and trying to draw the appropriate lessons for the future?

Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that the great moral blame for what has happened must lie with Sinn Fein-IRA and with no one else? They have persistently and blatantly breached their obligations under the ceasefire and the agreement. Why does the Secretary of State find it so difficult to say so unambiguously and explicitly?

Will the right hon. Gentleman and the Prime Minister, who is sitting beside him, not accept that the Government cannot escape their share of responsibility for allowing the situation to deteriorate in the way that it has? Was is not a very serious error of judgment not to respond at all to the successive Sinn Fein-IRA breaches of the agreement and the ceasefire, such as those in Florida, Colombia and Castlereagh—we all know what they were—as we urged the Government to do at the time? How can anyone seriously have supposed that failing to respond at all to blatant breaches of that kind could do other than encourage Sinn Fein-IRA to go for worse breaches in the future? Was not that fundamental error compounded by the extraordinary decision during precisely that period to offer Sinn Fein-IRA new concessions going right beyond the Belfast agreement, such as the promise of an amnesty for on-the-run terrorists or a special status in the House? Since Sinn Fein-IRA have so clearly breached the good faith on which the Government were counting when they offered that concession, is it not now time to review it?

We can all hope that however much the Government want to wriggle away from this and however much they want simply to sweep all those issues under the carpet and say, "Well, this is a new beginning; let us not talk about the past", they are inwardly contrite about those mistakes because it is very important indeed that, as and when we get back to devolution, mistakes of that kind are not made again.

Now let me turn to the immediate practical issues that arise. Will the Secretary of State clarify what he just said about elections in Northern Ireland remaining on schedule for May? Does he mean that those elections will still take place even if there is no Assembly at the time for those elected to sit in? If that is not what he means, will he just elucidate the position to the House? Of course, if he tells us that he is certain that we can return to devolution by that time, we shall be the first to be delighted. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Oh yes, indeed. Labour Members do not like that, but I have to tell them that they will not be able to shout down the history books. When the history of the peace process is written, it will show that our judgment was vindicated by events and that our judgment would have enabled the process set up by the Belfast agreement to continue.

How do the Government propose to legislate from now on for Northern Ireland? Does the Secretary of State accept that Orders in Council, which cannot be amended here, are a thoroughly unsatisfactory method of legislation? Does he also agree that Parliament will now need more time to consider Northern Ireland because of the much wider range of responsibilities for which Ministers here are directly accountable? Does he therefore agree that Northern Ireland Question Time will need to be longer than it has been in recent years? What role does he envisage for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee? Does he agree that, above all, in present circumstances, we must not repeat the bad example of last year, when there was not a single policy debate on Northern Ireland in Government time in the whole of the year? We had to use Opposition time for such a debate before the House rose in July. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet with the Opposition and the Northern Ireland parties to discuss how scrutiny can best be applied in these new circumstances and how Parliament can do its job?

Finally, and very importantly, will the Secretary of State be frank with the House on any understandings or undertakings—I include informal understandings—that may have been reached with the Government of the Irish Republic on consultation or co-ordination with them under the new direct rule regime?

Dr. Reid: First, may I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations to my colleagues, and for his kind remarks, which were well deserved, about the Chief Constable.

In terms of what arrangements have been made with the Irish Government or the other parties, my priorities in the first few days and the first week have been to attend to the governance of Northern Ireland. I shall therefore meet the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, as they were yesterday, along with other Ministers, to achieve the handover. At that stage, I shall discuss matters with the Irish Government and the other parties to consider how to carry forward the other aspects of the process. That will probably be done, as I think I said in my statement, through the British-Irish intergovernmental conference provided for in the agreement.

As for blame, I think that the hon. Gentleman was not listening to what I said, as he claimed that I was reticent to blame republicans or Sinn Fein for what happened. I mentioned Colombia and Castlereagh, and, having said that it was improper to prejudge things—I think that it is—it would be naïve to underestimate the political effect and the effect on public opinion of those events. I went on to refer to the impact of the opinion of the charges brought against republicans, including members of Sinn Fein—I said that specifically—as a result of the police operation of 4 October. It is therefore beyond rhetoric to suggest that I neither alluded to nor referred to Sinn Fein; I specifically mentioned it.

As for the exclusion option that was available to us, we were presented with various options ranging from doing nothing—which was urged on us by some parties—to suspension of the Executive, suspension of the whole body, exclusion of Sinn Fein and exclusion from the process. As I said earlier, the option on which we decided was the least worst one; there were no good options in terms of balancing the magnitude of what we were trying to achieve against the problems that we face at present.

As for the elections, my comments stand. The election date remains unaffected by anything that I said yesterday. The election date was 1 May; it still is 1 May. We will obviously have to keep the date in mind in view of the real world, real politics and real circumstances, but there is no reason at the moment for anyone to feel that anything has changed about the election date. If, before or after it, we are faced with an impasse of the nature that we have at the moment, it is an issue that we shall have to consider at that time or, indeed, before it.

The hon. Gentleman referred to parliamentary procedures, and they will have to be discussed through the usual channels. It is not a matter for me how those procedures are finally decided upon but, if he wishes to speak to us about them, I am more than happy to make sure that Parliament carries out the appropriate scrutiny as it sees fit, given the portfolios that have been added and the extension of powers that I have now found thrust upon me.

I merely wish to make a final comment. Although the hon. Gentleman tries hard on these occasions to show a veneer of bipartisanship, he does not rise to the extent of the project that we are attempting to grapple with. I well remember the Anglo-Irish agreement, the Downing street declaration and the secret talks with the IRA, all of which took place when he was on the Conservative Front Bench and when the IRA was still committing acts of atrocity and was still visibly in the middle of a terrorist war. Because of the magnitude of the prize that was before us, we managed to give support to the then Government—his own party—when they were conducting such talks with the people conducting a murderous and terrible campaign, so a little more grace and support from him would rise to the occasion.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, while 3,000 people were killed in Northern Ireland during the troubles, as many people have been forced into exile over that period and still remain in exile? Is it not therefore welcome that last week Gerry Adams met in the House Joseph McCloskey, the nephew of Danny McBrearty, to discuss the problem of Mr. McCloskey's exile and to talk about the possibilities of his returning to Derry? Such developments are welcome and Sinn Fein must realise that, if it acts in that way and puts pressure on the Provisional IRA to see that those whom it had placed into exile could return, it will help tremendously towards creating the confidence in Northern Ireland that will allow the process, the Assembly and the Executive to be re-established.

Dr. Reid: I agree with every word of that. I know how active my hon. Friend has been on this issue, and it is nothing less than terrible and a tragedy that, because of the threat of violence against them, people should feel that they cannot return to the place where they want to stay and where, in many cases, they were born and brought up. I also think that, although much of the recent commentary in the press has concentrated on the so-called spy ring that centres around the charges that have been brought, the most distasteful aspect of the issue is the fact that prison officers and their families, who have every right to think that the threats that they used to think were held over them had long disappeared, once again found themselves in a position of trauma and fear.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): And what does the Secretary of State deduce from that?

Dr. Reid: Will the hon. Gentleman let me continue? For the first time in many years, some people came out in the morning and had to remember to check under their car. It is that type of trauma. I am trying to face up to the problems that the process is facing at present while maintaining the process, which, in my view, gives me and Members of the House the best chance that we have had for decades—indeed, for centuries—to solve this problem. To those who find those obstacles too difficult to overcome and who want to get back to the old ways, I merely say that we tried it the old way for more than eight centuries. If that did not work then, it is not likely to work now.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I thank the Minister for early sight of his statement and welcome the two new Ministers to a portfolio that, among other things, is never dull.

The Minister hopes for a short suspension. What does short mean to him? How might the arrangements change if the suspension is still in place in, let us say, January 2003? He talks of both communities, but will he consider altering the Government's terminology? There are many communities in Northern Ireland. He knows that I often have cause to think that using the concept of two communities simply serves to divide. In that context, can he assure us that all parties will be involved in any talks given the central contribution of the Alliance party of Northern Ireland and the Women's Coalition in particular to breaking past deadlocks?

Will the Minister confirm that the date of the elections will not change even if Ministers are concerned that the consequence of holding them on 1 May will be a less desirable, perhaps a more hardline, outcome, because no one should attempt to gerrymander a particular outcome by changing the date? What specific arrangements will be in place between Westminster and

[Lembit Öpik]

Dublin to ensure that business continues? What are the Minister's plans for Assembly salaries if the suspension is long term?

Finally, does the Minister agree that the best thing that United Kingdom parties can do is to support political solutions rather than to win party political points at a time when Northern Ireland needs our support rather than our rhetoric? In that context, does he hope, as the Liberal Democrats do, that the suspension works and, once the process is back on track, that those who have sounded rather opportunistic this afternoon will not only accept their error of judgment but, more to the point, be willing to alter their strategies to be more supportive of what is clearly a sincere effort by the Government to do the right thing?

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman and his party for their continuing support throughout this process. He raises a number of points. On consultation, I will consult all parties, including the Alliance and all parties represented in the House, because that is the basis on which a review has to be carried out. I apologise for referring to two communities. I should, of course, refer to the two traditions in the one community in Northern Ireland. Language is sometimes difficult in the context of Northern Ireland politics.

There is no change to the elections. No one is, or should be, frightened of the elections. I do not believe that anyone is frightened. To paraphrase Bertolt Brecht, it is not up to us to dismiss the electorate and choose another; it is the electorate who have the right to choose their representatives. However, elections do not happen in a vacuum. We had elections, we had an Executive and we had an Assembly. The reality is that despite the fact that we had elections and a democratically elected Assembly and Executive, they could not work because of the lack of confidence and trust between the partners in power sharing. If that continues indefinitely up to 1 May, it is not easy to see what can be resolved by having another set of elections.

Although that is all I have to say on that subject, it brings us to the crux of the matter: we cannot go on expecting people to share power with partners who appear to be riding two horses, of violence and democracy. A choice has to be made. Eight years after the beginning of the ceasefire and four years after the agreement, there needs to be a definitive step change in that position so that that ambiguity is removed. Even if that were the case, there would of course be a continual residue of problems with which to deal. No one thinks that we can wave a magic wand and by decree stop all lawbreaking or violence overnight, but we are at a crossroads and I do not believe that it is possible to sustain the power-sharing element of the agreement unless there is some substantial and definitive move in that direction.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Of course the Secretary of State is right not to pass judgment on individuals, but we know certain facts. The Secretary of State may like to confirm the estimates in the press that, as a result of the security breach at Castlereagh, £30 million has been spent on relocating police officers at threat and it is likely to cost twice as much to relocate prison officers who are at threat. Will he confirm also whether the press is accurate in saying that more than 1,000 documents were stolen, most of them from his office? That fact indicates a massive breach of security in the Northern Ireland Office and points to the possibility of gross incompetence in that office. Surely in that situation there must be an arrangement for an effective inquiry to see whether, and in what ways, security has been breached.

The Secretary of State refers to a lack of confidence and trust. Will he bear it mind that in each of the last three years my party went into an Administration on an inclusive basis and on the basis of promises and undertakings given to us, and each time those promises were broken and Sinn Fein and the republican movement failed to deliver? Will he also reflect on his curious use of the term "power sharing", in which he thinks only of Sinn Fein? There are others, and in this matter it is wrong of him to overlook the moderate nationalist Social Democratic and Labour party.

The Secretary of State had options, and the demand for, or suggestion of exclusion, which would have been fair, did not come from Unionists alone. As he knows, it was supported by the Alliance party, which has links with the Liberal Democrats, and we are glad that the Alliance party displayed that courage. The Secretary of State is aware that support for exclusion would have extended beyond that point.

There is a point at which confidence is needed elsewhere too. In July, the Secretary of State said that he was showing republicans the yellow card. People noticed that the red card did not appear in circumstances in which the man in the street thought that it would have been appropriate. The Secretary of State has to explain why he funked it, because in the view of the man in the street that is precisely what happened: the Secretary of State decided that he would sacrifice the political process for fear of what might happen to the cessation of military operations declared by the IRA.

Dr. Reid: On the first point, I cannot confirm the press speculation about the costs, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that they are considerable—they are huge. Measures have to be taken to protect the police and, perhaps, prison officers who may be vulnerable after the events at Castlereagh. Apart from the anguish that it causes those families, that is a huge diversion of resources from the priorities of the people of Northern Ireland. It is tens of millions of pounds that could be devoted to the regeneration of inner-city or outer-city areas, to the health service and so on.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about the number of documents that were stolen. From what the police have told me, I understand that his estimate is not far off. He said that we have to examine what is being done at Castlereagh, among other things. I can tell him that the security service has already agreed to send a team to conduct an independent and authoritative review of security in the Department. The team will make recommendations for the future when all is known about the events that led to the criminal charges. It will also audit security practice generally.

I do not want to go into further detail because I do not want in any way to impinge on judicial proceedings, but I can tell the House that, before these events, certain

steps had been taken on the advice of security authorities. They were obviously ineffective in this case, whoever is guilty, and I do not prejudge that question.

This is a serious blow, and as I said earlier, although the matter that has made the headlines is the retrieval of documents for use by others and whether that may have put them at an advantage in the political process—I do not prejudge that question either—I find the fact that prison officers may be under threat more disturbing than anything else.

The right hon. Gentleman mentions the exclusion motion. I hear what he says, and it is not a matter that leaves me unmoved, precisely because I know the courage and, above all, endurance that he has shown by staying in the Assembly for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland. I understand that fully. I say only that that these are not easy judgments to make.

The right hon. Gentleman is right about the Alliance party. I understand that it would have been prepared to support an exclusion motion had I put one before the Assembly—although I do not think that such a motion would have passed; the SDLP made it clear that it would not support it. Nevertheless, the fact that the Alliance party was prepared to support it shows that a significant change is taking place. The Women's Coalition would not support exclusion, but was apparently prepared to support suspension of the Executive rather than of the Assembly as a whole. No one should think that no change of opinion is occurring within the Assembly on these matters.

There is lack of confidence on both sides. People ask me, "Are the Unionists really committed to this?", but the evidence of the endurance shown over the years by the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the Assembly gives the lie to any claim that there are no Unionists who are prepared to put the whole of Northern Ireland first, rather than their party. Their commitment should be a sign of confidence to the whole community.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I welcome the two new Ministers on what is, for me, an especially sad day. In another place at another time, more than 30 years ago, I saw a power sharing arrangement dissolved in the same way. It took more than 30 years to re-establish such an arrangement, yet this is the fourth suspension in four years.

I welcome and agree entirely with the Secretary of State's statement that the full implementation of the Good Friday agreement, in all its aspects, is the only way forward. I agree also that if devolution is to be workable and durable, there must be trust—but let us not enter a state of denial when looking at where the lack of trust lies. Of course Sinn Fein has broken faith with everybody, not least with those of us in the nationalist community who have insisted and will continue to insist on inclusivity. Sinn Fein has to rid itself of the discredited dual strategy and commit itself to democratic, peaceful means.

Another example of lack of trust is the view in the nationalist community that not all Ulster Unionists are in favour of inclusive government and partnership politics. That is not a criticism of those in the Ulster Unionist party who are in favour of those things, but if we are to solve the problem it is right to specify that lack of trust. A third example of lack of trust is that many in the Unionist and nationalist communities wonder in what type of an arrangement two Ministers can have as their policy the destruction of the very agreement from which they derive their ministerial office—*[Interruption.]* DUP members are abusing it.

Those three elements will have to be addressed if we are to re-establish devolution. Unless we find answers, we will not be able to reinstate devolution in the way that is necessary to make the full agreement work.

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman points to the complexity of addressing even that limited question of trust within the limited area of power sharing. I merely say that many things undermine trust—for example, the ongoing murderous campaign of loyalists, which will be combated. However, because they are not partners in power sharing, their campaign does not necessarily undermine power sharing. Many Unionists are sceptical, but because other Unionists are involved in the partnership, that scepticism does not, in itself, undermine power sharing.

The problem is the element of concern about the partners in the power sharing from the republican movement—Sinn Fein. If Sinn Fein is thought to be involved in an ambiguous dual-track strategy, its involvement in power sharing makes that far more important in undermining power sharing. That is why I have emphasised that, among all the issues that affect confidence, we have to address that one perhaps more keenly than any of the others.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): May I join other Members in welcoming the two new members of the Northern Ireland Office ministerial team? I assure the Secretary of State that my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds) and I are happy to meet our successors in office to talk over the issues that affect those Departments.

I also join the Secretary of State in his condemnation of terrorism. Members on this Bench, at whichever end they sit, will not soften that criticism one iota for loyalist terrorists. We consider their activities despicable, murderous and foul, and will take every opportunity to say so. May I disabuse the Secretary of State of the notion that the problems that affect the process are confined to a narrow area? Wide-ranging opposition within the Unionist community is affecting Unionist trust in the whole process. Rather than the Secretary of State undertaking an idle review with yesterday's men, who cannot deliver, is it not time for him to go to the people and allow the electorate to speak? Let politicians get a fresh mandate and enter negotiations for stable political structures in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I do not question at all—indeed, I am well aware of—his condemnation of all violence and murder wherever it originates, including on the loyalist side. I also thank him for saying that his ministerial colleagues are willing to discuss matters with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office. I do not disagree that if trust is badly affected in one area it is liable to affect a range of areas. These things develop; we get an understanding—an increasing or decreasing trust—as time goes on, just as the hon. Gentleman's own policies and awareness of

[Dr. Reid]

Realpolitik have developed. I was glad that he shared a table, if not words, with Martin McGuinness the other night. I noticed that he said clearly that if Sinn Fein has the mandate that we expect it to have after an election, that is a reality that has to be taken into account. I always welcome pragmatism, however late it is, and will engage with him.

As for the report of the political death of the First Minister, I am afraid that not only is it greatly exaggerated, but I have read about it so often that I never take it for granted, even when it is posted in the newspapers in Northern Ireland.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that now is the time to be honest and recognise the breakdown of trust that has led the Government to take action, not least since one party believes, or says it does, in a political way forward, but does not recognise the need to engage with a civil police service? Does he also accept that we must pick up the pieces and consider how that trust can be rebuilt? Will he say how he and his team will involve in that process many people—both elected representatives in Northern Ireland and those who have played their part in the Northern Ireland Policing Board and other commissions that have been set up following the Good Friday agreement—so that elements of trust that have been lost can start to be regained?

Dr. Reid: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that, in the new Northern Ireland, the efforts that we are making—which involve considerable pain for those who were previously associated with the RUC—to create a new, reformed, revitalised, community-based, effective police service that has cross-community support deserve to be rewarded by the participation of those who have been demanding precisely that for eight decades. I do not think that one can demand rights but not face up to one's responsibilities. Sinn Fein will eventually have to face up to that.

It is not for me to tell Gerry Adams how to lead Sinn Fein, but since he continually tells me how to do my job, it might be worth saying that what has happened has handicapped not only this process and power sharing but Sinn Fein itself. Its alleged association with violence in these cases is a ball and chain around the feet of a political party that has received further and further support precisely because it was moving into the political arena and away from violence. For that reason, as well as the reason that we shall not be able to sustain the future of power sharing in Northern Ireland unless Sinn Fein shifts, it would be as well to do so.

I agree that we need to revitalise support for the agreement across the community, beyond the political parties. We have let that slip. It is not easy to rejuvenate it. It is common to all peace processes of this nature that, after the initial euphoria, it is the aficionados who tend to become involved. I will gladly consider any ideas in that direction.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In the light of the remarks that the Secretary of State has just made about Sinn Fein, what possible justification is there for continuing the special facilities that its members have in this House? Given that they will not play a proper part as Members of Parliament, should not their privileged access to this place be suspended, at least during the suspension of the Assembly?

Dr. Reid: First, that is a matter for the House. Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) certainly feels that it has already offered some advantages—Mr. McCloskey met Gerry Adams here the other day. I sincerely hope that they manage to resolve the problem.

Sometimes, the apparently small things move the process forward. We have spent a lot of time, quite correctly, on the big issues such as Castlereagh, Colombia, and so on, but it should not go unnoticed, for instance, that Martin McGuinness said on Remembrance day that we should all respect the right of the British to remember the dead—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Gentlemen can throw that back in his face if they like, but I welcome that as a recognition of our failings on these matters. I welcome the fact that Alex Maskey, the Sinn Fein Mayor of Belfast, laid a wreath at the Somme. I welcome the fact that an alleged leading member of the Provisional IRA, Martin Meehan, said this morning that, in his opinion, the war had been over for some time. I just wish that mixed messages were not sent out and that there was no ambiguity in telling us that violence was in the past. If that were done and done definitively with clarity and backed by action, we would find power sharing a bit easier in the future than it has been in the past.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): I welcome my right hon. Friend's calm and reasoned approach. Can we reiterate very strongly the message that exclusion in Northern Ireland has always been easy and that it is inclusion that has been so difficult? Despite the sad and unnecessary rise in violence perpetrated by both Unionists and republicans in recent months, we need to remember that long-term progress has been rather good and that the atrocities that we used to experience weekly no longer disfigure that society. It would be very nice if all the paramilitary groups could wind themselves up and go away over the next few months—we must never lose sight of that message—but we need to take a long-term view and recognise where we have come from, that we are making progress and that inclusion is vital.

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend is right that we need to keep a sense of perspective about where we are in Northern Ireland, even on such sensitive issues as law and order. In some areas, there has been a considerable increase over the past two years in disorder on the streets, for instance, as against what went on in the two years previously. However, there has also been a continual reduction over the years—in some ways a dramatic one—in the number of murders in Northern Ireland.

On drugs, I want to see those on the streets dealing in drugs lifted and put where they should be—behind bars. I know that that is an ambition shared by the Chief Constable. Although it is a problem of great concern in Northern Ireland, the rate of drugs misuse in Northern Ireland is estimated, in terms of arrests and convictions, at one eighth the rate in Scotland. A sense of perspective is necessary. Similarly, when we consider the resources

that we put into dealing with the matter, yes, they are overstretched, but there are three times as many police per head in Northern Ireland as there are in other parts of the United Kingdom, and the position is about the same as regards resources.

We do combat the problems. It is not always easy to suffer the minutes and to watch the hours, but my hon. Friend is right: when we look at the hours, the years and the decades, there has been a significant move forward for people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Was it really wise to suspend? Does not the Secretary of State understand that for very many people it is deeply offensive that the constitutional parties, whether nationalist or Unionist, in Northern Ireland were penalised through no fault of their own? Is it not solely and exclusively the fault of Sinn Fein-IRA because of their violent activity? Will the Secretary of State now say unequivocally that the reason the power-sharing Executive and the Assembly have been suspended and are at breaking point is Sinn Fein-IRA's activities, and theirs alone?

Dr. Reid: I have already made known my position on suspension. Yes, I do realise the burden, annoyance and frustrations of those who feel that they have done very little and yet are having their commitment and capacity to improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland taken away by suspension. I have also made it plain, as somebody who has supported devolution all my life—unlike most of the hon. Gentlemen on the Opposition Benches, I might say—that I would have preferred not to suspend, but I have given my reasons for that. The right hon. Gentleman will not have missed the fact that some of people who he says were so pained at being suspended had actually resigned last week, so that was slightly out of my hands.

As regards the future, I am making judgments on these cases. I do not claim that they are infallible judgments or that they are necessarily right. They are my political judgments. They are made in an attempt to sustain the whole process on an inclusive basis, with the potential to resolve decades-long, generations-long and in some cases centuries-long problems, violence and conflict. If we look over the past five or 10 years, there is enough evidence there that up to this point that judgment has proved correct. What we need now is a substantive indication, as the right hon. Gentleman said, from Sinn Fein that that judgment has been correct—that the trust that we placed in the republican movement and its willingness to move to the democratic resolution of problems and away from violence, as long as we provided democracy, justice and opportunity for them, was right. That is the challenge facing us over the next few months.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I recognise that my right hon. Friend had little alternative but to do what he has done. Is it not a fact that the present situation will only cause pleasure to those who opposed and undermined the Good Friday agreement from the very start? Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that he will work closely with the Irish Government during the time the Assembly is suspended, and that it is extremely important that the two Governments should work together? Is it not a fact that Sinn Fein must take some responsibility for playing right into the hands of those who opposed the agreement from the beginning?

Dr. Reid: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that I will be working closely with the Irish Government on the matter. May I say how much I welcome the statement yesterday making it clear that there had been no ambiguity in the choice between violence and democracy? It was a statement not just from the Prime Minister of this country, but from the Taoiseach—the Prime Minister of Ireland. It was an indication of how strongly he and the Irish Government feel about the position. I look forward to working with them, and I greatly welcome their support and their efforts.

Dr. Julian Lewis: What exactly does the Secretary of State think that IRA-Sinn Fein intended to do with lists of the home addresses of prison officers and police officers, together with lists of which of them had and had not been issued with firearms for their personal protection? Why does he think that the IRA-Sinn Fein cell responsible for this latest disgraceful episode described the Prime Minister with two words, one of which was "naïve"?

Dr. Reid: As someone who always closely considers the evidence, the hon. Gentleman should not believe everything that he reads in the newspaper, although since I am not allowed to reveal any secrets, I cannot contradict anything that he said. On the intentions of the perpetrators of the incident, I cannot prejudge whether the IRA or somebody else was responsible. I can only refer him to the statements that I have been making publicly as well as privately for a considerable time, saying that a ceasefire, even when I judge it in the round to be intact, is not the point. The point is that, if people are on ceasefire but are maintaining a capability in terrorist terms that could be used to break a ceasefire in the long run, they will destroy the confidence that is necessary for power sharing. I think that that answers his question.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. We must now move on to the next business.

A-level Grading

5.21 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to make a statement on A-level grading.

As the House will know, following the publication of examination results in summer this year, there have been concerns about the grading of A-level and AS-level examinations and about the way in which exam standards are set and maintained. I recognise the anxiety and uncertainty that that has caused. Students have been left unsure whether their grades in A-levels and AS-levels this year accurately reflect the standard of their work. On behalf of the education service, I repeat my apology to all the students who have been affected. My responsibility throughout has been to ensure that the concerns are carefully and thoroughly investigated, that the recommendations are acted on as rapidly as possible and that clear action is taken to avoid this situation ever arising again.

Early last month, headteachers' representatives and some examiners expressed concerns about the grading of the work of some students in this year's A-level and AS-level examinations. The complaints focused in particular on changes that had been made to grade boundaries in some of the papers. Given the seriousness of the allegations, on 19 September I set up an independent inquiry under Mike Tomlinson, the former chief inspector of schools. His interim report, which was published on 27 September, identified weaknesses in the way in which the exams had been assessed this year, and recommended a process of regrading. That work has now been completed. Letters went last night from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service to all students on its records whose grades had been revised. Since 10 o'clock this morning, a UCAS helpline has been in operation.

Mike Tomlinson announced this morning that a total of 9,800 candidate entries have had unit grades raised. All the adjustments relate to the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations Board. In the majority of cases, they have not resulted in a change to overall grades, but 1,945 candidates have had their overall grades raised—733 for AS-levels and 1,212 for A2 results.

UCAS holds a record on 1,089 of those students, of whom 689 are already in their first-choice university, although a small number are not on their first-choice course. A further 232 had no offer from their first or second-choice universities and are therefore unlikely to be affected by a grade change. On current UCAS estimates, that leaves about 168 students who may be eligible to transfer university. UCAS has told us today that there are no more than eight possible new students for any single university.

May I briefly outline the action that the 168 students need to take? Students who think that they may be eligible to move institution are being advised to contact their preferred university or college. Universities have been advised by their representative body, Universities UK, to honour all offers made to students before the publication of A-level results in August, and I am confident that they will do that. As I said on 27 September, the fact that institutions have already admitted their full quota of students for this year may mean that students who wish to transfer will be offered places for next year rather than this year. Clearly, the fact that the numbers are much lower than some speculated will make matters much more manageable. Universities and colleges have agreed to make final decisions no later than 31 October. Universities and students will not be disadvantaged financially if the latter move university due to regrading.

In his report of 27 September, Mike Tomlinson also gave his preliminary views on what had gone wrong. In particular, the QCA had not issued guidance on the attainment expected for a specific grade in individual papers. It had not provided a clear, consistent view of the standard required to ensure the maintenance of the overall GCE A-level standard. In addition, although AS units were piloted, A2 units were not.

I also asked Mike Tomlinson to investigate allegations that external pressure had been put on examining boards to lower the number of passes to protect against the allegation of lowering standards. Mike Tomlinson concluded that Ministers and the Department had applied no such pressure. He further concluded that officers at QCA had acted within their guidelines, but went on to say that

"on the evidence available, the actions of the boards during the grading exercise arose from the pressure they perceived that they were under from the QCA both to maintain the standard and achieve an outcome which was more or less in line with the results in 2001".

On 27 September, I decided that the confidence of the examining boards and the headteacher representatives in the QCA's leadership was damaged and that its future would be best served by a new chairman. We shall shortly announce the name of a new interim chair.

I recognise that a major task for the QCA and my Department is rebuilding confidence in the QCA and our examination system. Ken Boston, the new chief executive of the QCA, has announced a timetable for implementing the recommendations in Mike Tomlinson's report. By the end of October, there will be additional guidance on AS and A2 standards. By mid-November, further work on the statistical issues that underlie assessment and a revised code of practice for the conduct of the process will be completed. The QCA will also put in place improved communications with all partners. Current students on AS and A2 courses can be reassured by those actions that marking and grading standards in 2003 will be robust.

Ken Boston has also announced that he will set up an examinations taskforce. Its job will be to oversee the effective delivery of the AS and A2 exams in January and July 2003. It meets for the first time on Friday and will comprise representatives of headteachers as well as the exam boards. I welcome that decisive action.

Mike Tomlinson's report also provided wider lessons for the way in which the Government plan and implement such major changes. The Department will act on those lessons. Mike Tomlinson will now tackle the second part of his remit: to review more generally the arrangements for setting, maintaining and judging A-level standards. He will report to me and the QCA in November.

Today's announcements are supported by the headteacher and teacher organisations, including those who raised the original concerns. All students who took examinations this year can be confident that the regrading process has been independent and fair.

I recognise the importance of exams as a means of measuring achievement and giving young people a currency for higher education and the world of work. It is therefore especially important that our assessment system is fair, transparent and efficient.

Although it is important to acknowledge this year's difficulties, it is also important to remember that the principles behind Curriculum 2000 were wholeheartedly endorsed. That must not be lost.

Mike Tomlinson has given us a clear way forward for re-establishing confidence in the A-level system, and for ensuring that standards are clear. I hope that this will enable us to avoid the sterile annual debate about exam standards, when better results should be a cause of celebration for young people and their teachers.

I want to put on record my thanks to all those in the education service who brought the original concerns to our attention. Their co-operation in and approval of the process that we have undergone have been crucial. I am also grateful to UCAS and Universities UK for their helpful and constructive approach. Finally, I would like to thank Mike Tomlinson and his team for the speed of their actions, their thoroughness and their integrity.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of her statement, and I add my thanks to Mike Tomlinson for the work that he has had to do.

Today's announcement of the A-level regradings represents one more step in what has been the worst crisis ever to affect the exam system in this country—a crisis made worse by the staggeringly inept way in which it has been handled by the Secretary of State and her Department. Tens of thousands of students have had months of not knowing whether their grades were mis-marked. Two thousand families now know that they were fiddled out of the proper marks, and 88,000 others have been severely disappointed today, all because Ministers insisted, against the advice of their officials, on introducing the new A-level system too fast and too soon. Mike Tomlinson described that system as an "accident waiting to happen". The accident happened, and the Secretary of State is still trying to evade responsibility.

The root of this fiasco has been political interference in the exam system. I am afraid that nothing in the Secretary of State's statement suggests that she is prepared to reduce the degree of political meddling in the details of education, which are best left to heads, teachers and examiners. In her statement, she confirms that officers at the QCA had acted within their guidelines. If she believes that, why did she sack the QCA's chairman, Sir William Stubbs? Will she admit to the House now that he was a convenient scapegoat, used to take the pressure off Ministers? Will she also tell us why Sir William would have put pressure on exam boards to downgrade the marks if he did not believe that he was serving the interests of his political masters? It is not in the interests of the exam boards or of the QCA to depress the grades. It might, however, be in the interests of Ministers to do so, if they were worried about accusations of dumbing down.

So let us have the Secretary of State's explanation of why Sir William acted as she has accused him of doing. Interestingly, the Secretary of State said in her statement that she had sacked Sir William not because he had put pressure on the exam boards, but because the boards perceived that they were under pressure from the QCA. Might it have been possible that Sir William perceived that he was under pressure from Ministers?

While we are on the subject of the QCA, will the Secretary of State finally commit to making it fully independent of the Government? The main job for her, or her successor, is to restore confidence in the exam system. That will not be achieved until it is completely taken away from political interference. If the Government were to introduce legislation in the next Session to achieve that, we would give it a fair wind.

On the exam boards, why does the Secretary of State think that only one board has been implicated in this problem? What did OCR do, under this perceived pressure from the QCA, that the other boards failed to do? How does she propose to deal with the 2,000 students who have suffered? She says that students will not be financially disadvantaged. Will she tell the House what the compensation package will cover? Will she also make it clear what she will do for the other 88,000 students who will be feeling angry and disappointed today because they have not been regraded? *[Interruption.]* Ministers say that those students got the right grades. I would recommend that they find the time later to visit the BBC website and read the comments of some of the students who have been affected. The words "whitewash" and "sham" appear frequently. Many of those students may want their papers re-marked, not regraded, but their schools will be put off by the cost. Will the Government do the decent thing and pay for any re-marking that is demanded by those students?

Can the Secretary of State now clear up why an AS-level is worth 50 per cent of the marks when the exam board says that it constitutes less than half the work? The authorities said that the schools misunderstood the situation, which is a real insult to thousands of heads and teachers. Can she understand why two exams, each of which received 50 per cent. of the marks, might be regarded by reasonable people as being of equal weight?

The Secretary of State said that she has asked Mike Tomlinson to produce another report by next month. Will she now agree to a fuller review, completely independent of the Government, to look into the whole future of A-levels? Without that, the system will continue to fall under suspicion. The QCA's own task force will not be enough because by her actions the QCA has been proved to be simply an arm of Government.

The Secretary of State eventually apologised for the damage that the scandal has caused. For 50 years, A-levels served young people well, with all concerned regarding them as the gold standard for exams. Her place in history is secure as the Minister who destroyed that gold standard. No one doubts her integrity, her decency and her good intentions—but with that integrity and decency she has set up a system that has not worked, she has obstinately ignored advice that it would not work, she has tried to evade personal

[Mr. Damian Green]

responsibility for the fiasco and she has failed to take the first step towards restoring confidence in the exam system, which is for her to resign.

Estelle Morris: I cannot believe that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) has just said that he wished that more students had received incorrect results. *[Interruption.]* That is essentially what he said. All those students who now know that the results they received in August were accurate should be pleased by that. The hon. Gentleman said that he wished that more had found out today that they had been given inaccurate results in August. That is not my view. The hon. Gentleman has spent so much time jumping on every passing bandwagon in the past few weeks that he has forgotten to read the reports that Mike Tomlinson has produced.

Let us be clear about what Mike Tomlinson said. Political interference in the exam system is a serious allegation. I said when I gave my first statement on the issue that not only had no political interference ever taken place under Labour Ministers but that I believed that it had never taken place under any Conservative Minister. Even if the Liberal Democrats were ever to get to be Education Ministers—*[Interruption.]* That is going too far and I withdraw that comment. Seriously, I believe that politicians are unanimous on the issue and not one of us—we are all committed to the education of our children—would dream of instructing the chief executive or the chairman of the QCA to fiddle the results. We did not. I had the decency to say that the hon. Gentleman and his party would not have done that, but he did not have the decency to say that we did not. Mike Tomlinson, who is impartial, has said that. Nobody accused us of doing so—not the Headmasters and Mistresses Conference, the Secondary Heads Association, or any of the other head teachers associations. Bill Stubbs said that there was no political interference. The allegations came from elsewhere, but Mike Tomlinson said, in any form of words that he could find, that there was no evidence, written or verbal, and no allegation that Ministers interfered. He concluded that there was no interference.

The problem now is not that you do not believe us or the integrity of our profession, but that you do not believe Mike Tomlinson, the former chief inspector of schools. On that you rest, and it is up to you to justify it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The Secretary of State has forgotten herself for a moment. She must use the correct parliamentary language.

Hon. Members: Regrade her.

Estelle Morris: Only from A up to A*.

The hon. Member for Ashford spoke of an accident waiting to happen. Mike Tomlinson did say that in the press conference on 27 September. The position was that there were no subject-specific grade criteria and no clear, consistent view about the standard required. The statistical and practical issues had not been fully worked through. All those are responsibilities of the QCA. Because that infrastructure was not in place, it was, as Mike Tomlinson said, an accident waiting to happen. He also said that the chief executives of the three examining bodies believed that they were being put under further pressure. The three inadequacies in the infrastructure and the perceived pressure that I have described account for what went wrong this year.

I come now to the matter of timing. Mike Tomlinson said that the structure had been introduced too quickly, and I have said all along that I accept every one of his recommendations. I shall act on them, but I want to clarify the record in respect of the timing.

When this Government were elected in 1997, A and AS examinations had been consulted on already by the previous Administration. Those examinations derived from a report by Ron Dearing—an excellent man, and the report was not bad either. In those days, the Tories were committed to AS-levels. They want to withdraw them now, but that is a different matter.

We decided in 1997 to consult further on the matter. The previous Conservative Government might have introduced their proposals in 1997, but we delayed until 1999. We then consulted further. After that further consultation, we postponed the implementation of A and AS-level exams for a further year, to 2000. By that time, four years had passed since the publication of Ron Dearing's report on the wider curriculum for 16 to 18-year-olds.

I accept Mike Tomlinson's contention that a delay of three years rather than two might have prevented some problems. We intend to learn from that, but I want to say two things in that regard. We delayed introduction for two years after 1997 because of the results of consultation. No plea to delay introduction by another year was made to us, either in papers or correspondence from the QCA or as part of the consultation, and neither was any such plea made to us by any organisation representing head teachers. However, I accept Mike Tomlinson's report and, as I said in my statement, I believe that it is something of which Government should take note.

I come now to the important questions of compensation for students, and the QCA. Some students have been inconvenienced financially and made poorer by the extra accommodation, tuition and travel costs incurred when they chose to change universities. They will be reimbursed by a special fund being set up by my Department.

As for the QCA, the House should recall that it was set up by the previous Administration. Its impartiality has served the country well, but I accept that the time may have come when the public—and, more importantly, teachers, parents and students—want added safeguards to ensure that impartiality. That is why I welcome the decision by Ken Boston, in whom I have the greatest confidence, to establish what I might call a stakeholder body, involving head teachers and their representatives, to oversee the examinations to be held next January and June. Mike Tomlinson will monitor that body's work overall, and it will provide an added safeguard for next year's results.

However, Mike Tomlinson may say in November that further safeguards are needed, and he might make proposals to that effect. If so, we will adopt them. The Government have no interest in doing anything

other than ensuring that the increased standards achieved by pupils, students and teachers over the past five years are supported by a robust examination system.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the way in which she has responded to a problem that has been very difficult for the Government. However, will she confirm that the staff at OCR has been completely absolved from any blame? That is important for me, as many of them are my constituents, and OCR is based in my constituency.

Estelle Morris: I appreciate my hon. Friend's constituency interest in that. Of course, OCR is an independent body, and it is for its members to read and absorb Mike Tomlinson's report. However, that report went no further than to examine the actions of OCR's chief executive and senior examiners. I hope that my hon. Friend can take some assurance from that, although I leave that to her sound judgment.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for advance sighting of her statement and for her courage in coming to the House to deliver it.

Liberal Democrats remain committed to the A and AS process, although we accept Mike Tomlinson's comment that it was rushed and that the extra year would have made a significant difference. We also believe that it is essential that the QCA is not simply reformed but abolished in its current form and that we have an examination watchdog that is totally independent of the Department for Education and Skills. Without that, everything else will be considered a fudge.

We have had two months of sheer hell affecting tens of thousands of young people who were subjected to experimentation at every level of their school life, their teachers, their further education college lecturers and their parents. In that time, our examination system has become the laughing stock of Europe and, indeed, the world. Yet now it appears that nothing happened and that all is well. It appears that either the shy and retiring Sir William Stubbs panicked when he discovered that this year's results were 0.3 per cent. out of line with his predictions and forced the exam boards to redraw the grade boundaries or that this year's students at AS and A2-level had a universal dip in performance, not when they sat their exams, handed in their course work or when their work was marked, but when their papers were graded. That is the sum comment of the Secretary of State today.

Far from restoring confidence, today's statement merely adds to the belief that the dead hand of Government was behind this débâcle. We are delighted that 1,953 students have received positive gradings today, but tens of thousands have been left wondering "what if?" Is the Secretary of State prepared to publish the numbers of students who would have gained different grades on the original grade boundaries? That set of statistics is crucial in determining where the fiddling went on.

At the heart of this fiasco is the question of standards, particularly that of maintaining the gold standard at A-level. Does the Secretary of State accept that simply using the word "standards" again and again without defining what it means has contributed in large part to the chaos? Does she agree with the QCA, which clearly thought that it meant limiting the number of students achieving certain grades, or does she agree with the Minister for School Standards, the hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband), who told the QCA last week that this definition

"places a block on talent and ambition"?

The Government are right to maintain standards vigorously but they have no right whatever to determine how many students meet those standards. However, that is the impression that is abroad this year.

This statement speaks volumes. It speaks of a Secretary of State who panics every time bad news arrives and does not have the guts to say to No. 10 that running scared of criticism is no way to run a Government. Does she accept that No. 10 would not sanction charges of grade inflation, and that is what really lies behind this sorry saga? Will she confirm that in her Department's media plan, agreed with No. 10, deflecting accusations of grade inflation came near the top of the list of priorities for July and August? Will she confirm that the press releases issued on 14 August by QCA and 15 August by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg), along with numerous articles about gold standards, were all planned in advance to head off criticism of grade inflation? Will she admit that her Department created such a climate of paranoia over maintaining the gold standard that this year's fiasco became inevitable?

In short, the Secretary of State is responsible for this year's A-level fiasco and she must apologise to the 90,000 students who feel that they have cheated.

Estelle Morris: I suppose that one of the advantages, or disadvantages, of being in perpetual opposition is that one can change one's mind about six times a day. To be honest, in the past few weeks, the hon. Gentleman has been changing his mind between the "Today" programme and "World at One", but so be it.

On the grading question, I am a mite cross with the hon. Gentleman at this point in time. Let us just think about it. In August, we were accused of grade inflation. The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), who speaks for the Conservatives, went on the "Today" programme followed by "World at One" to say the same thing, unlike the Liberal Democrats, and I grant him that—that given that A-level grades had improved, we must immediately have a thorough inquiry into the exam system. He did not congratulate the students and teachers on working harder and learning more effectively; he said that there must be something wrong with the system because the results had improved. Mike Tomlinson actually reports that at the root of the problem, at every level of society, is an unwillingness to believe that, year on year, our children can learn more effectively, students can get better and teachers can teach more effectively. Having heard that in August, in September the Government were accused of grade deflation. All of a sudden, rather than making the exams easier, to get better results, we had made the exams more difficult to get the grades lower. That is the complexity of the situation.

[Estelle Morris]

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) is usually generous of spirit and, with Labour Members, he usually gives due recognition to the achievements of youngsters in August when the results are announced. He always does so. He will know, therefore, that maintaining that their grades are due to the fact that they had worked harder and achieved more is a pretty difficult task. That is why we are prepared to assure the nation that there has been no political interference in the setting of grade boundaries or anything else; it is no more and no less than the result of the hard work of our teachers and pupils.

What is sad about what the Opposition spokesman and the hon. Gentleman have been saying today is that we set up an independent inquiry and, in effect, they have both said that they do not trust its results. They must think about the message that that gives to head teachers, parents and students. Both the hon. Gentlemen are still saying that there has been political interference in the setting of exam grades this year. There has not been—no evidence of that has been found—and while the Labour party is in power, there never will be. I also repeat that I do not believe that there ever would be were any other party in power.

Opposition Members have a choice. They can continue to play politics with that accusation or they can think carefully about the implications that it has for teachers and the students who are now studying for next year's examinations. No matter whether hon. Members believe us or Mike Tomlinson, the key thing about the report today is that every single organisation of head teachers that brought the original complaint, both from the maintained and the independent sectors, has signed up to say that the process undergone during the past few weeks has been robust, that they trust it, that it is fair, that they think that students now have the right grades and that they want to get on with teaching and learning. I back them. I certainly do not back the hon. Member for Ashford.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I must inform the House that many hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. Could we please have shorter questions and, hopefully, shorter answers too? I call the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller).

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Does my right hon. Friend yet have enough information at her disposal to determine whether the papers that were wrongly marked were in one geographical area, or were spread about? Has she been able to draw any conclusions from that data yet?

Estelle Morris: No, I have not. The list of units—we must remember that they are units and not full subjects—were published and have again been published today for anyone who wishes to look at them. It would depend on which schools in which geographical areas tended to choose OCR as an examining body. I cannot give my hon. Friend a geographical make-up, but all the units that were regraded were from OCR, not from the other two examining bodies.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Does the Secretary of State now accept with the benefit of hindsight that, despite the delay and the consultation, this problem had its origins in the way in which AS-levels were introduced, when the first warnings of grading problems were issued? Obviously, she has only a few weeks to ensure the credibility of next year's system, but when she considers her longer term duty of restoring the reputation and status of A-levels will she no longer rule out abandoning the AS experiment, which has contributed to this problem and caused endless other problems inside schools too?

Estelle Morris: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is clearly well versed in the matter given his former post. For the record, AS-levels, which used to be a 40:60 not a 50:50 split, emanated from the discussion document published by the Conservative Government and Ron Dearing. When we took power, we consulted. At the time, it was a 40:60 split, but it was to count for 50 per cent. of the marks. During the consultation, people thought that that system was too complicated and we came up with a 50:50 split. Interestingly, that was widely accepted by schools.

I accept that the technical implementation of that 50:50 split has caused difficulties. One thing that Mike Tomlinson said was that he would have expected the QCA to study a number of different ways to ensure that the statistical processes for getting that split were robust. He did not say—I specifically asked him this because of course, I would want to consider it—that inherent in a 50:50 split is an inability to get it right. He said that more statistical modelling needed to take place. The new chief executive of the QCA has agreed to undertake that.

What schools need now is certainty. Whatever is for the long term, I want to give them an assurance that no further changes will be made to the syllabuses—to what pupils learn and what they teach—without timely consideration and due warning—that is, not in the foreseeable future.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Does my right hon. Friend accept that parents, teachers and students will contrast the dignified, decisive and, today, feisty way in which she has responded with the squalid and childish response of those on the Opposition Front Bench? When she is considering these matters further, will she give some thought to whether the introduction of an international baccalaureate, or something similar, might in the long term help to overcome some of the problems?

Estelle Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. An interesting debate has been going on in education circles for as long as I can remember about the baccalaureate and it has now been put in the public domain, and rightly so. It is important to give assurances, as I told the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). I do not want schools or teachers to go away from any debate in the House thinking that the system is about to change again. If my hon. Friend means by a baccalaureate some sort of

overarching qualification in which we can recognise both the study of some subjects in depths, which are A-levels, and that broader curriculum, that is something in which I personally and the Government have been interested. I put on the record that that is for the long term, not the immediate term. What schools want to know most of all now is that there will be no immediate changes. I welcome my hon. Friend's contribution, however. That is a debate that the education service and this House should continue.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Is an AS-level half an A-level or not?

Estelle Morris: There are six modules in an A-level: three at AS-level and three at A2. AS-levels count for half an A-level. They are recorded in the performance tables as such. Due to the linear nature of some subjects, it was deemed that the first year six, usually the AS-levels, would be marginally easier than the old A-level standard. To maintain that standard, therefore, the second year had to be marginally more difficult than the A-level standard. That is where the difficulty lies. What is clear is that the overall standard of AS and A2 is the same as previous A-level standards.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I thank my right hon. Friend for the apology that she has issued to students this evening—a refreshing change, to which Opposition Members are obviously not used. I have had inquiries from only two students in my constituency. Given the hype raised by the battle cry of "political interference" and "interfering" from the Opposition parties, I would have expected more. Is it not the case that those battle cries do not undermine the Government in the way that Opposition parties clearly intend, but undermine those students who are now facing difficulties? Should we not now focus on how to ensure that the students affected get the help that they need quickly and how to announce a robust system to the House in the next eight weeks, so that we can have clarity for next year's exam results?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is right. I hope that the details that I have been able to give the House today about the students—just under 200—who are eligible to change university, the procedures for this year's examinations, the changes we shall make and the support we shall give reassure her.

Criticisms were made today about acting precipitately—acting too quickly or too slowly are both accusations that have been made over the past few weeks. What I have tried to do during the past few weeks was actually to deal with the problem that arose at the start of September. This is the first occasion on which I have made any political comment, either party or otherwise, or attacked anybody. While others have been doing that over the past few weeks, I have been busy getting on with solving the problem that arose. I hope that today I have been able to lay it to rest.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am surprised that the Secretary of State should conspicuously have failed to recognise the work of many individual staff at the OCR, many of whom may be my constituents who work in Cambridge, or those of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). If the Secretary of State persists in scapegoating the QCA and the OCR, they will recollect that she and Ministers were responsible for insisting that 40 per cent. of the work at AS-level should be counted as half an A-level, for the botched implementation of the AS-level in the first level and for the ill-advised assessment review in 2001.

Estelle Morris: I think that I have already answered the latter points. I am certain that, as regards the hon. Gentleman's constituency, he misheard, rather than deliberately misunderstood; none of the comments that I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) were meant to imply any criticism of staff at OCR. I said, and I say again, that OCR will read the report. I reassured my hon. Friend that Mike Tomlinson's comments had been at chief executive and senior adviser level. To reassure the hon. Gentleman about his constituents who work at OCR in whatever capacity, I have made no comments about what they have done; I have referred them to Mike Tomlinson's report and I am happy to say that again.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): Perhaps one of the saddest aspects is the cloud that has hung over all A-level results, so will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the tens of thousands of successful A-level students and pay tribute to the work of their teachers and schools?

Estelle Morris: Of course.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) talked about the generation that had been experimented on, but they have also achieved more than any previous generation at each of their examination stages. I congratulate them and their teachers, parents and families for supporting them. Like my hon. Friend, I am delighted that the number of students who were today notified of changes in their results was lower than we might have expected.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Does the Minister understand that one of the reasons why her whitewash today will not wash is that too many of us have direct personal experience of this fiasco? My daughter, whose AS-level grades were affected, rang me today from her school to express the anger felt by her teachers and friends about the totally inadequate response comprised by the report and the Minister's statement today. It ducks the major issue. Does she not understand that only comprehensive re-marking of the relevant papers will suffice? Will she go back to her office and immediately order that re-marking, and offer to pay for it as well?

Estelle Morris: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should distrust Mike Tomlinson's report and the word of the HMC, the Secondary Heads Association, the National Association of Head Teachers and all the teacher representatives. It is a good report, with good work over the past three to four weeks, and I am sorry that so far not one Opposition Member has chosen to support Mike Tomlinson and his recommendations.

As regards marking, the exercise undertaken by Mike Tomlinson has been wholly unusual. Never before has anyone had to look at the way in which grade boundaries were set. There is a well-established process

[Estelle Morris]

for any school that wants remarking to take place. By the time the inquiry was set up the number of schools that had asked for re-marking rather than regrading was roughly the same as in previous years, except at OCR where the number was significantly higher. That led me to say that it looked on the face of things as if there was a problem at OCR. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will know that when any school which applies for re-marking—the boards have extended the period during which that can take place—and re-marking takes place, the fee is sent back to the school.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): What will my right hon. Friend say to the 17 pupils at Horsforth school in my constituency where English literature marks were changed to the extent that some of those pupils received 91 out of 120, rather than 21 out of 120, and others received 102 out of 120? Would it surprise her to learn that the examination board involved offered no apology for its mistakes and all the trauma that was caused? What reassurance will she give pupils, parents and the school not only that we shall learn the lessons from this fiasco but that in future examination boards will have a much more human face?

Estelle Morris: I know that my hon. Friend will take back the comments that I have made to the House today, expressing our understanding of the distress that the students must have gone through. His comments only serve to remind us that we were absolutely right to act as we did in setting up an independent inquiry, letting it do its work and reporting to the House when it had completed its tasks.

As regards any points that hon. Members raise on the future of examination boards or the impartiality or robustness of the examination system, it is good to have the debate, but I am determined to wait for part two of Mike Tomlinson's report. At that point we shall no doubt have the opportunity to discuss and debate it further.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Given that Ministers introduced the AS-level, given that Ministers approved the increase in repeatable coursework and given that Ministers had sight of the draft QCA guidance on grading, how does it follow that Ministers had no responsibility at all for the accident about to happen? Discuss.

Estelle Morris: Grade E, bordering on U.

Given the hon. Gentleman's previous post, I should have thought that he would understand that the setting of grades, sending out subject specifications or anything to do with the marking assessment system is hands off for politicians. I do not question for a minute that the situation was not the same in his day. It is hands off for politicians and it is important that that remain the case. The QCA is responsible for setting out subject-specific guidance and for all the implementation and mechanics of the system.

I am responsible for the policy. I am responsible for making sure that when something goes wrong it is put right. I am responsible for Curriculum 2000 and I am happy to be held accountable for that. I cannot be held responsible—nor can any politician—for interfering in the exam system because politicians should not do so. We did not do that and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not either.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the root cause of the problem is that some people just will not believe that A-level results are improving? They do not believe that more than a minority of people should be allowed to take A-levels and go to university. Should those people not be pointed in the direction of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development research that found that we now have the eighth best education system in the world? We should be complimenting pupils rather than running them down the whole time.

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is, of course, exactly right. We have an excellent education system in which standards have increased at every key stage, at seven, 11, 14, 16 and 18. We should be proud of it.

I say again that we cannot be proud of the events that led to the statement. I acknowledge that. No one would want to pretend otherwise. However, each Member of the House, from all parties, has to make a personal decision: whether to accept what has come from the report, to learn from it and move on and to congratulate our students and teachers on their achievements, or whether to continue to make political capital over it—I think some have already made that decision.

I have dealt with the problems that arose during the past few weeks. We shall now move on and that will include recognising the achievements of the generation of children who are in our schools at present.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): The grading problems came to light through the starkly contrasting results of children who had been awarded previous A grades but final U grades in their modules. Anyone who has been a teacher knows that that is almost impossible and very unlikely in large numbers. However, C and D grades followed by mistaken U grades may be more difficult to identify. Has the Secretary of State satisfied herself that young people across the grading system—not merely those with As and Bs initially—have been treated fairly?

Estelle Morris: Absolutely. I did not know this two months ago, but I can now tell the hon. Lady that in order to set the grade boundaries, what first happens is that the A pass rate is set and the E pass grade is set, and then the grades in between are calibrated, presumably, within that framework. When that process was gone through again, every single grade would have been affected, so I want to offer the assurance that the process that has just been undergone has not just been about whether people who got an A or an E or a U got the correct grade; it has been about every single grade. Indeed, some of the young people who have been notified of grade changes today will find, for example, that they have a C that goes up to a B. It has been done effectively.

I again give the hon. Lady an assurance, because I do understand the seriousness of the matter; many Members of the House, not only as constituency MPs

but as parents, as the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) said, know the importance of this and I note his concerns. But every single person who complained about the grading of this year's examination results has signed up today and said that they think that the process has been fair, that they are happy with the results and that they want to move on. I hope that we can do so as well.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the Secretary of State realise that the stridency of her statement and the brazen lack of contrition that she has displayed this afternoon make us all comprehend why she so regularly gets the bird at teachers' conferences? She keeps on citing the judgment of Mr. Tomlinson. Are not parents, teachers, the universities and, not least, students entitled to have a Secretary of State in whose judgment they can trust?

Estelle Morris: I think that, as I said before, the role of the Secretary of State in this is, on hearing of concerns, to look at the evidence, take action and ensure that the matter is put right. I set up this inquiry some three-and-a-half to four weeks ago. Within a relatively short period, a great deal has happened. I have been responsible for ensuring that the inquiry has been carried out effectively. I have been responsible for ensuring that it has been brought to a timely conclusion. I have been responsible for ensuring that at every single stage of that inquiry, those whose concerns brought the matter to our attention in the first place, were satisfied with the procedures that were being used. I believe that that is the sort of Secretary of State that teachers and the nation want.

Points of Order

6.12 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will recall that "Erskine May", on page 266, addresses a problem of sufficient time to deal with business. We have before us an important debate on post offices and other matters, but we also have the matter of local government finance, which represents 25 per cent. of public expenditure. Even with good will, I cannot imagine that we shall get on to that before 8 o'clock or maybe even later. That does not allow sufficient time to debate this important issue. Have you had an indication from the Leader of the House or from the Deputy Prime Minister that one of them will be coming to the House to make a statement on change of business so that we can have additional time to discuss this matter, which is vital to all our constituents?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I do understand and sympathise with the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, and indeed with other hon. Members in the House who hope to contribute to the debates. The timing of debates and the order of business are in the hands of the Government and I have had no notice of a statement of the type in which the hon. Gentleman is interested.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I raise a point of order concerning the treatment of the House of Commons by the Executive, for the consideration and reflection of Mr. Speaker? On 7 February 1996—

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): 1896.

Mr. Dalyell:—1996. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), then the shadow Leader of the House, said in relation to the Scott report:

> "I ask you, Madam Speaker, what you can do to ensure that Members of the House, and in particular the official Opposition, are not deliberately disadvantaged by the procedures being adopted by the Government."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 331.]

My right hon. Friend returned to the subject the following day, saying:

> "Does the right hon. Gentleman think that it is in the spirit of Madam Speaker's statement yesterday that Ministers should have eight days to consider the report while the Opposition have only six hours?"—[*Official Report*, 8 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 472.]

Indeed, the present Leader of the House, a week later on 15 February, at column 1146, complained bitterly that the then Government had had eight days and Members of Parliament had had eight minutes.

It is in the recollection of Members that on 24 September, a dossier of 55 pages on a rather complex subject was published at 8 o'clock. It was subsequently described, rightly or wrongly, by President Putin as little more than propaganda. My question is this: if reports are published for the consideration of the House, should not they be published—as they perfectly easily could have been—two, three or four days before, so that they can be considered not only by Members, but on the anvil of informed opinion? Quite bluntly, I think that it was a

[Mr. Dalyell]

calculated, cynical attempt to give a rather different gloss on a report than that which was actually contained in the report. These things should be subject to argument, because otherwise it will be seen as a deceiving the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for giving notice to Mr. Speaker of his point of order. The House can reasonably expect notice of important Government documents before they are the subject of debate, and Mr. Speaker attaches importance to this principle. The exact timing of the issue or publication of Government documents, however, remains a matter for Ministers, and the Speaker has no power to direct when papers will be provided.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice. Hundreds of schoolteachers in Devon this evening are looking to tonight's debate on local government finance to give them hope in tackling the underfunding of children in Devon and to help them campaign for fair funding for Devon schoolchildren. Now that the Government have squeezed that debate into two hours, how can these issues properly be dealt with by the House? What message can I take back to the people of Devon about the way that this Government have once again sought to sideline the importance of the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already answered that point of order, I think, which was raised by a Member on the Front Bench.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I heard your decision and your ruling about the timetabling of business being in the hands of the Government, but I hope that you will bear it in mind, given the representations being made to you about the limited time to debate three very important issues tonight, that we are shortly to consider changing the Standing Orders of the House in order that Members can, apparently, swan off to cinema clubs in the evenings. I hope that you will convey to—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I repeat what I said earlier. We are now discussing the merits. I have already given a ruling on the point of order.

Mr. David Curry: (Skipton and Ripon) On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is this on the same topic?

Mr. Curry: Yes, and it is absolutely relevant, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order for you to inform the House of how many hon. and right hon. colleagues are seeking to catch your eye in the debate on local government finance, so that the Government may form a view as to how much additional time would be necessary to accommodate those very important views?

Madam Deputy Speaker: May I suggest to the right hon. Gentleman, who is very well experienced in the running of the House, that he approach that through the usual channels?

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I take it from the fact that Mr. Speaker has set a 10-minute limit on all speeches that there is considerable demand to take part in the local government debate. Can you confirm that, as the Order Paper stands at the moment, it is likely that there will be debate on a ten-minute rule Bill and then the hour and a half for the Post Office, and if we then come on to the Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Bill and there is concern about that Bill, it could well be that we have no time to debate local government at all, and the only people we shall listen to will be Ministers? Surely that cannot be part of the way in which the Speaker would condone a debate's taking place in the House on such an important issue, which represents 25 per cent. of public expenditure?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the point that I made earlier, but say too that the business of the House today is due to finish at 10 pm. It is to some extent in the hands of Members how the remaining time that we have is spent.

Corporate Responsibility (Environmental, Social and Financial Reporting)

6.20 pm

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish and provide for the functions of the Corporate Responsibility Board; to require certain companies to publish reports on environmental, social and economic matters; to require those companies to consult on certain proposed operations; to specify certain duties and liabilities of directors; to provide for remedies for aggrieved persons; and for connected purposes

In recent years—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Will the hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber please do so quickly and quietly?

Linda Perham: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In recent years, many people have come to understand the implications of the size, influence and power of major corporations. Fifty-one of the 100 largest economies in the world are now corporations, rather than countries, and the largest 500 companies in the world control two thirds of world trade. Clearly, business is a large and powerful player on the world stage. We also know of the major problems that companies have caused environmentally, socially and economically in many countries around the world, of which Shell's well-publicised disputes with the Ogoni people in Nigeria and Nestlé's continuing marketing of breast milk substitutes are well-known examples.

At home, too, I should be surprised if any Member has not had to deal with problems, brought to them by local people, caused by the activities of companies in their constituencies, such as shock job losses when production is suddenly moved overseas, pollution incidents, planning issues or the latest scandal in many constituencies—hidden mobile phone masts.

To argue that everything done by big corporations is bad would, of course, be ridiculous. Companies are creating jobs, developing products, providing services that we all need and investing in communities, but we need to be sure that they are serving the needs of society at large, not just their shareholders, and many people now feel that that requires changes in the law.

An important point must be made. When companies behave badly in ways that affect the richest and most powerful in society, there is a clamour for new rules and regulations. One has only to look at the readiness of the American Government to strengthen laws on financial processes after the collapse of WorldCom and Enron to see how fast we act to protect wealthy investors. That response is not wrong, but we should be equally determined to act when company activities affect the least well off, bearing in mind that the environmental and social impacts of companies' activities usually hit the poorest hardest.

When I introduced a similar Bill earlier this year, it had the backing of Amnesty International, CAFOD, Friends of the Earth, the New Economics Foundation and Save the Children. Since then, support has grown enormously. Major unions have come on board—including, I am pleased to say, my own union, Unison. More development agencies have joined, such as Christian Aid, and Traidcraft—a business that has led the way in trading ethically and has taken care over the environmental and social impacts of its activities—also now supports the Bill.

The Bill that I hope to introduce today has four key principles. Its first requirement is for mandatory reporting on social and environmental impacts. Experience has clearly shown that a voluntary approach to reporting is ineffective. Three quarters of the FTSE 350 companies that were challenged by the Prime Minister to produce environmental reports in October 2000 completely ignored the call. There is a business case for mandatory reporting. The few companies that have responded to the Prime Minister's challenge would like the playing field to be levelled, as their competitors, who can currently undermine the better standards for which the best companies strive, would come under the same pressure from investors.

Embracing the corporate social responsibility agenda is likely to have a positive effect on staff recruitment, productivity, costs, innovation, quality, brand and reputation. It also protects the integrity of the free market, which is only possible when information is freely available to investors, customers and suppliers. The Bill would also change the basic duties of company directors, requiring them to minimise the environmental and social impacts of their activities.

Another major strand of the Bill is the requirement that companies must consult affected people on major projects, and all the best companies already do so. Indeed, many Government supported schemes already require such consultation, before export credit guarantees are given, for example. The Bill would spread what is currently best practice and make it common practice.

Finally, the Bill would allow stakeholders to challenge companies on the content and accuracy of their reports and on any impacts a company might have on its environment or its community. The Bill includes measures to prevent malicious complaints, but it is right that it should be possible to challenge companies' claims of environmental righteousness if they are clearly false—greenwash, as it is often known.

To protect reporting standards further, the Bill would require greater transparency and the setting up of a standards board. The board would include representatives of business and experts on the impacts of companies' activities, and would be charged with drawing up a framework of standards, ensuring that it provides appropriate information without being burdensome. The board could also carry out occasional checks on performance—perhaps examining a handful of reports each year—and assist with complaints about companies' reports.

The Government have accepted many of those principles in the White Paper on company law. The draft clauses already require an operating and financial review, which would have to include some environmental and social reporting, and would also widen the duties of company directors. Although the principle of those changes is right, the detailed wording currently leaves too many loopholes. For example, the proposals apply only to economically significant companies, leaving most businesses untouched.

[Linda Perham]

The White Paper estimates that about 1,000 companies will be required to produce an operating and financial review, with a total turnover of around £1 trillion—roughly a third of the total turnover of United Kingdom business. My Bill, with its £5 million turnover threshold, would capture abou. 85 per cent. of economic activity by requiring just 2.5 per cent. of companies to report.

The Government's proposals also require reports on the environmental and social impacts that are relevant to the company, not necessarily those that are relevant to society—a crucial difference. I am also troubled that the proposed law requires reporting only on the company's policies on environmental and social issues, so a bad company with no policies need not report at all. Although a future companies Bill will recognise and include important points and accept the principle of mandatory reporting, it is unlikely to achieve significant environmental and social benefits. By winning the arguments for corporate social responsibility, we will secure the changes needed to protect the environment, defend human rights and safeguard the interests of shareholders, investors, workers and consumers across the world.

A wise man said recently that we are at our best when we are at our boldest. The Bill is bold; it would deliver measurable improvements to people's lives in Britain and abroad, and it would challenge other nations to follow our lead.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Linda Perham, Mr. Barry Sheerman, Mr. Martin O'Neil, Dr. Vincent Cable, Sir Teddy Taylor, Ms Glenda Jackson, Mrs. Jackie Lawrence, Mr. John Horam, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Tony Colman, Sue Doughty, Mr. Simon Thomas.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY (ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL REPORTING)

Linda Perham accordingly presented a Bill to establish and provide for the functions of the Corporate Responsibility Board; to require certain companies to publish reports on environmental, social and economic matters; to require those companies to consult on certain proposed operations; to specify certain duties and liabilities of directors; to provide for remedies for aggrieved persons; and for connected purpose: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Thursday 14 November, and to be printed [Bill 193].

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Members should be aware that the digital clocks on each side of the Chamber were re-programmed during the summer recess in order to give a longer warning period. The warning lights will now start to flash one minute before a time limit is due to expire, rather than 30 seconds, as previously. That applies to the end of time-limited speeches and to the end of time-limited debates. The next item of business will be the debate on urban post offices, which has a time limit of an hour and a half. I must also announce that there is a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches in all debates for the rest of the evening.

Urban Post Office Reinvention Programme

6.30 pm

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move,

That this House authorises the Secretary of State to pay, by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, in respect of the urban post office reinvention programme, a sum exceeding £10 million to Post Office Ltd.

The report of the performance and innovation unit on modernising the post office network was published in June 2000. It was widely welcomed in this House and outside. It included 24 recommendations, all of which the Government accepted.

A key recommendation was that if the Post Office decided that fewer offices were needed in some urban areas, the Government should consider providing financial assistance to the Post Office to ensure that sub-postmasters were adequately compensated for the loss of value of their business. Post Office Ltd. is now planning a three-year urban network reinvention programme. Following discussions between Post Office Ltd. and the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, the Government announced on 3 January their agreement in principle to fund the compensation package.

In March, the Government applied to the European Commission for its approval of funding for the programme, and approval was announced on 18 September. The House is being asked today to agree the funding for that programme.

The House will want to understand why the urban post office network needsrestructuring and why the income of the post office network has declined. Thereasons date back more than 20 years, and past under-investment has been an important factor. Greater mobility and changes in shopping habits have alsosharply reduced customer numbers. The Post Office is not alone in having had to deal with these changes. Other networks, such as those of the retail banks, have been scaled back too. Post office networks in other countries have been through similar changes. I recently met Monika Wulf-Mathies, a board member of Deutsche Post and a former European Commissioner, who told me that in Germany consistent profitability has been achieved by reducing the number of post office branches from 30,000 to 13,000. Other countries have also embarked on a similar process.

Some factors have had a particularly big impact in the UK.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): There is clearly a rational case for a change in the structure of post offices. The Government have accepted it, as most people do, but the Post Office is pre-empting the process. In my area, five post offices have either been closed, temporarily closed with no signs of reopening, or their future is open to consultation with a view to closure. That is not the rational process that my hon. Friend and other Ministers promised us. It is a culling of inner-city post offices, and it is not fair to people who are less mobile or who have less access to transport, public or private, and who therefore depend on the post office.

Mr. Timms: I am aware, as my hon. Friend says, that there have been closures. Indeed, closures have been

happening for years. The case that I want to put is for a properly planned, properly managed process, which will protect access to the post office network in every urban area. I hope that I will be able to persuade him that that is about to commence.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth Sutton): Will my hon. Friend assure the House that Postwatch and hon. Members will be properly consulted on what happens to our constituents and post office customers?

Mr. Timms: I am very happy to give my hon. Friend exactly that assurance about the role of Postwatch.

Several factors have had a big impact on the post office network. Post office income has been heavily dependent on benefit payments. More than 42 per cent. of benefit recipients now access their benefit payments via bank accounts, compared with only 26 per cent. in 1996. If we compare the last financial year with five years previously, we see that the number of retirement pensions and widows benefits paid by order books and giros dropped by more than 1 million—from just over 6 million to less than 5 million—even though the total number of pension recipients rose by more than 1 million. The number of child benefits paid through giros dropped from just under 5 million to less than 4 million, and payments at a post office of incapacity benefit fell even more dramatically—from more than 2.5 million to less than 1 million.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Timms: I shall finish the point if I may.

The drop in benefit transactions at post offices, however, has not been due only to people switching to bank accounts. The number of people receiving working age benefits has fallen in total. In February 1997, 1.6 million people were claiming jobseeker's allowance. By February this year, the number had fallen to 890,000. Clearly, that is a very welcome development, but it has reduced post office income. Benefit payment has accounted for up to 40 per cent. of post office branch income in some cases.

Mr. Tyler: I accept the Minister's point that this is a longer progress, and that it goes back to the time when Conservative Governments were pursuing this course. Will he give an explicit assurance, however, that the consultation process will consider the implications not just for post office business but for other businesses alongside, which are often in the same building? If one draws a pension or a benefit at one counter, one is likely to use that money at the other counter. The viability of a great many businesses is therefore at stake, not just that of post offices.

Mr. Timms: In a moment, I shall set out exactly how the process will work, and I think that the hon. Gentleman will receive the assurance that he seeks.

Other post office transactions have also declined.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Until I launched my post office petition in Eastbourne, many people were blissfully unaware of the changes in payments that will take place next April. Does the Minister share the concerns of, for instance, the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, that arrangements for the so-called universal bank simply cannot be in place by April 2003?

Mr. Timms: No. Those arrangements will be in place by April 2003. There will, of course, be a process of transition—not everybody will switch in April next year—and it will be properly planned and phased.

In the five years from March 1997 to March this year, Girobank transactions at post offices fell by 37 per cent. and postal order transactions fell by 13 per cent. There have been areas of increase, such as motor vehicle licences, lottery sales and bureau de change services, but they have only modestly offset the reductions. As a consequence, in many urban areas, there is now too little business for the number of post offices. The Post Office has the largest retail network of any organisation in Europe. It has half as many branches again as all the UK banks put together. More than 1,000 of the 9,000 urban sub-post offices have at least 10 other post offices within a mile. The volume of business through the network is simply no longer sufficient to support such a dense network. The restructuring proposed by the Post Office is intended to restore the urban network to commercial viability, restoring the confidence of sub-postmasters and making it possible to attract much-needed new investment into their post offices. The briefing circulated for this debate by the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters states:

> "There is an urgent need for re-structuring . . . Tough decisions must be made in order to ensure a viable network for the future to create bigger, better and brighter post offices."

I agree with it on that point.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Does my hon. Friend recognise that it is not simply a question of commercial viability, given the need for that number of post offices in urban areas? The Government's social exclusion policy would take a great knock if too many post offices were closed. Will he assure me that it will not just be a few of the usual professionally engaged people who will be consulted in this process? When a local community demands that a post office stay open and other people agree that it should stay open will he assure us that the Government and the scheme will support its staying open?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I can assure him that there will be a very thorough process of consultation around every proposed closure and that the Post Office will take seriously the results of that consultation.

The programme that is the subject of the debate relates only to restructuring the urban network—offices located in communities of more than 10,000 inhabitants. Our stated commitment to ending avoidable closures in the rural network remains in place, and it has led to very sharp reductions in the numbers of rural post office closures. However, for each urban area, the Post Office has received indications from sub-postmasters who would like to accept the compensation and close their business. Post Office officials will visit and walk around every area and make a careful study of the configuration of the offices and of local factors, such as public transport, demographics, geography and where the hills

[Mr. Timms]

are, to decide whether a particular office that a postmaster wishes to close can be allowed to do so. The aim will be to ensure that it is as easy and convenient as possible for customers to use other offices nearby and to maximise the amount of business from a closing office that can be captured by other offices. The programme will start with the smaller urban offices where the sub-postmasters are under the greatest pressure.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): The Minister should know that there are 15 so-called classified urban post offices in my constituency and that I can expect at least five of them to close under the new provisions. What will he say to my constituents in Chesham Bois who have seen the headline, "Last chance to save your post office" in their local newspaper? They are desperate and they have seen no sign that their representations and letters have been taken into consideration at all. What does he say to the elderly and infirm in my constituency who want to go not to a post office one mile down the road but to their local post office? I am sorry, but what he has said so far will not satisfy them.

Mr. Timms: I hope that the hon. Lady will pass on to her constituents the assurances that I am giving to the House. The programme—it has not started yet and it cannot start until the House has given its approval tonight—will not have the characteristics that she describes.

Where a sub-post office closes under the programme, the Government will meet the compensation costs—up to a total of £180 million over the next three years. An additional £30 million will be provided for modernising and adapting those offices that remain. Everyone recognises that many urban sub-post offices are much too dowdy, but the key to improving standards in them will be the increased volume of business that they can expect. However, the grants of between £5,000 and £10,000 for each office expecting to take on a significant number of additional customers—to be matched by the same sum from the sub-postmaster—will be an important boost, too. With the £30 million, this is the first time ever that a Government have undertaken a programme of investment in urban sub-post offices. It is an additional measure on top of the PIU report recommendations that we have accepted.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew).

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): As usual, my hon. Friend has been very generous with his time. May I clarify the position? I know that we are talking about the urban network, but there is some confusion between an urban and a rural sub-post office, and some of the designations have not helped. The problem in my area is that, until we can get the rural subsidy sorted out, the urban programme will appear to run into it. Will he clarify when the money is likely to be forthcoming to ensure that the rural network is properly funded in the short term?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend will know that we shall fund the commitment that we have given to ending avoidable rural closures. I anticipate that, in just a few weeks, we shall be able to set out exactly what the commitment will entail.

In the process of urban changes that I have described, the Post Office will generally require the receiving offices to improve their facilities and to increase their opening hours.Increasingly, we can expect sub-offices to maintain the same hours as the associated retail business that is alongside, thus greatly improving the service to customers.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Does the Minister not accept that part of the problem is that the Government have adopted a piecemeal approach? Has he read the briefing from the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters? Does he realise that there is great concern about the salary that sub-postmasters will be paid in the future, the whole mail system and the universal bank? Until those concerns are dealt with all at once, we will not resolve the problem properly. Does this programme not come too soon in the process?

Mr. Timms: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has read the briefing paper from the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, but one of the points that it stresses is the urgency of getting on with things. I do not agree that there should be longer delay.

The properly managed programme that the Post Office proposes is far preferable to the alternative of unmanaged closures resulting from falling income. At the end of the programme, more than 95 per cent. of people in urban areas will still be within a mile of a post office, and the majority within half a mile. Without the programme to which the House is being asked to agree, more and more urban sub-postmasters would simply shut down, even without any prospect of compensation, causing much greater disruption to customers.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): What assurance can my hon. Friend give to the people in severely deprived areas in my constituency who are served by 23 post offices and sub-post offices? Does he consider that the balance of funding in the programme is reasonable between compensating sub-postmasters for closing post offices and supporting post offices to remain open?

Mr. Timms: Yes, I do. One of the points that I shall come on to make is that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is developing a separate scheme—we shall announce the details shortly—to support specifically post offices in the most disadvantaged areas, the 10 per cent. most deprived urban wards. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall say more about that in a moment.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I need to make progress.

The programme will follow the code of practice that was agreed last year between Consignia and the consumer watchdog, Postwatch. For every proposed closure, merger or relocation, there will be an independent consultation process lasting at least a

calendar month and extended to allow for bank holidays. The consultation will be conducted by Post Office Ltd., closely involving Postwatch, and it will include writing on day one to the local Member of Parliament. To ensure that the needs of all customers have been properly considered—the elderly, disabled people, those on low incomes and others—Post Office Ltd. will, in developing its proposals, take account of factors such as the accessibility and viability of the remaining post offices, transport links, opening hours and numbers of counter positions.

At the start of the programme, all the closures will be in response to requests from postmasters who have said that they wish their businesses to close. However, it is possible that, towards the end of the three-year programme, there may need to be a small number of involuntary, but compensated, closures to finalise the shape of the urban network.

To come to the specific point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), there are more than 1,800 urban sub-post offices in the United Kingdom in the 10 per cent. most disadvantaged wards in the Indices of Deprivation 2000. I want to make it clear that, other than in the most exceptional circumstances, the scope of the programme will not extend to any post offices in urban deprived areas that are more than half a mile from the next post office. Very often, they are the last retail outlet of any kind in the area. The Government intend to improve and support post offices in those areas by means of a separate scheme to provide funding for investment and improvement to post office branches that would otherwise risk closure. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will shortly announce full details of that. The devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales are developing equivalent schemes. The merits of such a scheme are also being considered in Northern Ireland.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): Can my hon. Friend confirm whether the scheme that he describes for post offices in the most deprived areas will be funded separately from the package that we are considering? Will it extend to re-establishing post offices in those deprived areas from which they have vanished?

Mr. Timms: That scheme will be in addition to the programme that I am describing and its funding will be separate. As I said, my right hon. Friend will set out the details shortly, but I understand that the intention is to focus on existing businesses, especially if a sub-post office has a linked retail business, and to improve the viability of the whole business.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I want to make a little progress.

Let me emphasise that there is no predetermined list of post offices that will close. No arithmetical formula is being applied to determine the number of closures in an area. Closures will be determined by the present density of offices in close proximity to each other, by current and future business volumes, by the preferences of individual proprietors—a critical consideration—and by the public consultation process that will take on every proposal.

In some cases it might be concluded that, although a sub-postmaster has said that he wants to close a post office, that is not the best option given the position and prospects of neighbouring offices. If he still wants to close the business, it will need to be on the basis of a commercial sale of the business. One consequence of the programme should be a revival of the commercial market for sub-post offices, which has declined over the past few years.

Mr. Chope: Does that mean that the Government are reneging on their promise positively to support the role of post offices as Government general practitioners?

Mr. Timms: No, certainly not. As I said, we accepted all 24 recommendations in the PIU report and I am making an announcement today on the "Your Guide" project. Perhaps that is what the hon. Gentleman has in mind. He may know that the project was piloted in Leicestershire and that an evaluation of it was published at the end of the summer. It concluded that "Your Guide" was popular but did not have a big impact on either increasing the number of customers using sub-post offices or generating additional income for post offices. As the cost of rolling out the initiative across the country did not represent good value for money for the Departments that would use the service, we have decided not to proceed with national implementation of "Your Guide".

The pilot highlighted the potential for Departments to deliver services through post offices in future. There is also significant commercial interest in placing kiosks in post offices. For example, a commercial service based on kiosks in retail outlets, including in some sub-post offices, is expected to be piloted in Cornwall from next year. So we can expect kiosks to appear in sub-post offices.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The Minister may not know that "Your Guide" was piloted in my constituency among others. The big complaint was that there was no publicity. People went into the post office and there it was, which was great, but there was no publicity elsewhere. People will go to the job centre down the road rather than to "Your Guide" unless they are pointed in that direction.

Mr. Timms: It is my impression that the project was well known in the areas of Leicestershire where the pilot was carried out. It was certainly well liked by those who were asked about it. Unfortunately, it did not meet the criteria in terms of increasing the number of people using post offices and providing good value for money for Departments. However, there will be commercial developments in the near future along the lines that I described.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): I recognise the case that my hon. Friend makes, but can he assure me that he will look into the complaints that sub-postmasters in my constituency have made to me about the complicated process and the long time that it takes to open a post office card account?

Mr. Timms: I am aware of concerns about that. Card accounts will be available from the beginning of the new

[Mr. Timms]

financial year when automated credit transfer is introduced. We have made it clear all along that people will be able to obtain their money in cash at a post office through universal banking services. They will be able to do that either with a basic bank account provided by one of the high street banks, which allows their money to be accessible at a post office, or with the post office card account. There are a number of advantages to the basic accounts operated by the banks. For example, cash can be obtained from an automated teller machine as well as at a post office. In addition, basic bank accounts will support standing orders and direct debits. However, despite the advantages of a basic bank account, those people who have decided that they want a post office card account will be able to obtain one, which I think is what concerns my hon. Friend. There will be no barrier to that. People will simply need to ring the helpline and the process will begin.

I understand sub-postmasters' assertion that the post office card account is a more attractive proposition for them because it ties people into the post office. Many people will wish to be in that position. For others, however, there will be advantages in having a basic bank account as well, and we want people to be aware of those benefits—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I think I need to make a little more progress.

The compensation payable will be based on terms agreed between the Post Office and the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters. Outgoing sub-postmasters will receive a payment equivalent to 28 months of their remuneration, based on the best annual remuneration for a financial year since 1999. The scheme is based on longstanding arrangements through the joint discretionary fund. Payments are subject to certain conditions, such as a requirement that sub-postmasters at closing branches offer active support for the migration of customers to surrounding branches that remain open.

As a result of declining profitability, there has been a lack of investment in a large proportion of urban sub-post offices for many years. In parallel with the closures, the standards of facilities and service will need to be improved at many of the remaining post offices. Urban sub-postmasters who expect significantly more customers as a result of closures elsewhere will have the opportunity to apply for a grant on the basis of matched funding provided by the sub-postmaster. So the £30 million grant that the Government are making available should be matched by a broadly equivalent level of private sector investment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Can my hon. Friend clarify how the post office card will work? Will it be passed across the counter or put into a hole in the wall?

Mr. Timms: I am happy to explain that to my hon. Friend. Personal identification number pads—PIN pads—are appearing at post office counters all over the country. People will place their card in the reader, type in their PIN and have access to their cash.

Grants of up to £10,000 will be available on a matched-funding basis for new counter positions and equipment, to support open-plan or combined post office and retail positions and to provide new fascias, adaptations for disabled customers and other refurbishments to improve the branch.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): The Minister mentioned earlier a mechanism for consultation. Will he ask Consignia to guarantee that local authorities will be fully consulted before any closure?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I can give him that assurance.

The PIU report concluded that our network of post offices had not kept pace with change or, until now, exploited its highly trusted status as a provider of financial services. It was losing business. Sub-postmasters are business people, and they have found it increasingly difficult to make a living. They have been leaving the network in increasing numbers. If we do nothing, very damaging gaps will open up in the network.

The programme is therefore vital to ensure that the Post Office can maintain an effective network, offer attractive prospects to sub-postmasters and improve the service for customers. We need to take this opportunity to set urban post offices firmly on the path towards sustained viability, which is the key to enabling them to offer improved services for their customers from better, more convenient and more accessible locations.

I commend the order to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I am very conscious of the time limit on this debate and of the number of Members who hope to catch my eye. May I remind hon. Members that this debate is about urban post offices and the level of compensation available to them?

7.1 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): May I say how sorry I am that the Secretary of State is not here to support her Minister? This is a very important measure, and many people are concerned about it. The right hon. Lady's absence displays a certain discourtesy to her Minister and to the House. By contrast, the Minister was typically courteous and generous in giving way to so many Members during the debate. I hope that he will not think me unkind because I have some remarks about Government policy on the Post Office that he may not welcome.

The supposed main thrust of the Government's policy and the urban post office reinvention programme is to give the Post Office a sustainable future, as the Minister has just said, and it will be judged on that. Everybody in the House wants the network to survive and prosper. We all know the special place that post offices have in urban and rural communities. In villages throughout the country, in constituencies such as mine in Leicestershire and in deprived urban areas, the post office is often the only centre for meeting people and is valued as much for its community service as for its commercial activities.

Today Age Concern wrote to me and, I suspect, to everybody else, saying that

"for many older people the local Post Office is an important lifeline—providing a point of access to pensions and benefits as well as other financial services, a local general store, and a source of information and advice."

Each week there are still more than 15 million benefit transactions in post offices, which account for 40 per cent. of Post Office Ltd.'s income, although in many deprived urban areas the proportion is much greater.

Post Office Ltd., however, is trading at a loss; it is insolvent. The Minister failed to mention that. Consignia lost £1.1 billion last year, which is certainly an unsustainable position.

Mr. Timms: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman so early in his speech, but I need to correct the point that he just made. The Post Office is not insolvent. It is losing money, but being insolvent is a quite different matter.

Mr. Robathan: If the Post Office were a private company it would be insolvent.

Mr. Timms *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Robathan: I think that it would. We could argue the toss at length.

This is a very real crisis, and if Post Office Ltd. and Consignia were not supported by the Government, they would be in danger of going bankrupt. In the Minister's judgment, is it likely that the Post Office, in part or in whole, would call in the receivers if it were not backed by Government money? Could the Government allow that? What is their attitude to the current situation?

Why have Consignia and the post office network reached a position where we have to authorise the spending of £210 million of taxpayers' money today? The Government used to take a dividend from Post Office activities and the Post Office used to make a profit. Of course there were growing problems, and we sympathise with the Government about that. The previous Conservative Government recognised the problems nearly 10 years ago, but the Post Office still made a profit for the taxpayer.

Some 28 months ago the PIU reported, and we are implementing part of that report today, but why has it taken the Government so long to get their act together? The website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister says, under the heading "Fund for Deprived Urban Post Offices", that the Government announced in the urban White Paper in November 2000 that they would establish a £5 million a year fund to sustain and improve post offices in deprived urban areas. It continues:

"It is expected that the fund will become operational in Summer 2002."

Nearly two years on, the Minister tells us that part of the money that we are talking about today is that fund for deprived urban post offices, but when will it become operational? The temperature this morning told us all that summer is long past. Why has there been a delay?

The Minister has pointed out that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will have responsibility for introducing the fund. The website says:

"Further details when available will be posted on this page."

I printed off that quote just over an hour ago. Obviously the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister needs to update its website, especially as I understand that it is meant to be about modernising e-Government. It would be funny if it were not so sad. I suggest that we may judge the likely success of the Deputy Prime Minister's measures by that out-of-date website. Page 5 of the PIU report says:

"Now is the time to modernise",

but that was 28 months ago.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does my hon. Friend think, as I do, that the decision to expend an awful lot of money on converting the Post Office, a profitable, successful and much-loved public service, into Consignia, with all the costs that that entailed, showed that third way economics do not work? Only third way economics could turn a successful, profitable public service into a loss-making corporation in need of subsidy, and which is about to close many of its main outlets.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. We all recognise that Consignia is a totally ludicrous name. Allan Leighton must recognise that because I believe that the name will be changed back to Royal Mail on 4 November. This is one thing for which Labour Members cannot blame us.

The problem is not just endless delay and prevarication. Let us look at the PIU report's proposals for a sustainable future for the post office network. Some £30 million of today's money is being set aside for additional investment, which is only one sixth of the amount being spent on closures. One proposal in the report was for access to e-Government. That is a good idea, applauded by all, and for that reason, a year ago, as the Minister said, "Your Guide" was piloted in Leicestershire and elsewhere. It was welcomed and seemed to be a success, although it was insufficiently publicised. Now, however, the Minister tells us that "Your Guide" has been put in the bin. I understand that other Departments, in a classic example of Labour's joined-up government, refused to sign up to the scheme because they think that it would cost too much. That is a great pity, and I think that postmasters who saw "Your Guide" will agree.

What about the proposal for e-commerce? Has there been any action to encourage post offices to become distribution centres or pick-up points for goods purchased over the internet? The PIU report commented:

"The Post Office has been slow to react to this new opportunity".

Has there been an improvement?

What about the famed universal bank and, in particular, the card account? That is to be in place by April 2003. The clock is ticking, with six months to go. Everyone I talk to says that the Government are unhappy about allowing post office customers to apply for a card account, yet some 15 per cent. of benefit claimants currently do not have a bank account. The Government's unhappiness is caused by the fact that not enough money will be saved by introducing the account. That fact lies behind the card account customer journey,

[Mr. Robathan]

a copy of which I have here. After stage 1, a customer who has a bank account supplies the details and no further customer action is required. In an effort to browbeat claimants who do not have an account into opening one, there are 20 steps before the journey says:

"Customer starts to use account—withdrawing money on a regular basis."

Nothing could be much more complicated than that.

Moreover, I understand that the chief executive of the Post Office has been told by the Department for Work and Pensions that postmasters are not allowed to put up posters telling claimants that they can still get benefits in cash from the post office—all because the DWP does not want to pay the small extra cost. For that reason, too, there is a presumed limit of 3 million card accounts. In today's letter, Age Concern told us that

"many older people expressed a desire to continue to collect pensions and benefits over Post Office counters."

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May I amplify my hon. Friend's remarks by reporting that quite a few senior citizens in my constituency have made representations to me, both in writing and during my surgeries, saying that they are very anxious about the new arrangements, which they feel have not been properly explained? They are not at all keen to have to use them—they want to be able to collect their pension as they always have, and they bitterly resent the Government's preventing them from doing so.

Mr. Robathan: I agree entirely. That is an example of Government bullying: they are forcing people to do something they do not want to do in a typically nanny state way. At the heart of the issue of the card account is the conflict between the DWP, backed by the Treasury, and the DTI. Sadly for the post office network, the DTI is proving to be much the weaker Department.

Plenty of postmasters want to get out of the network, as the Minister said. Some 3,000 postmasters want to take the compensation package under the urban reinvention programme, which says something about morale. Last May, Allan Leighton said:

"People want to know, they want to know if they are in or they are out—what is my future".

There are plenty of takers, but the appalling uncertainty and prevarication surrounding the issue needs to be ended as soon as possible. Postwatch's annual report said:

"The slow progress is very disappointing. The sub-postmasters this year have become increasingly desperate as rumour fed rumour".

At last, we have today's debate, but it was on 3 January that a DTI announcement said:

"Post Office Ltd. will be embarking on a restructuring programme in the new year and where appropriate compensation will be made available for the sub-postmasters affected".

However, that referred to the new year past—not to the coming new year. How far has the restructuring programme gone? We heard no details from the Minister.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does my hon. Friend recall the Prime Minister's welcome for the PIU report in June 2000:

"I welcome this report which the Government fully accepts."?

Does my hon. Friend share my anger about the fact that only during this debate, in response to a question, have we learned that the Government have reneged on one of the commitments in that report? Does he agree that the best way for the Government to proceed now would be to restate what they intend to do as a result of the PIU report, and to announce a timetable?

Mr. Robathan: I agree entirely. I do not remember the Prime Minister saying that, but it does not surprise me at all, given that he says so many things on which he reneges the following month—but we will not go into such matters.

Postwatch does not know how far the restructuring programme has gone and it is extremely concerned that, far from a sensible restructuring, it, customers and everyone else will be presented with a fait accompli—earlier, the hon. Members for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) and for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) expressed their concern about that. Postwatch will be told that a post office is to close and that it can comment, but it suspects that the Post Office will not listen to its comments, which are made on behalf of the public.

Postcomm's annual report is more concerned about lack of investment to achieve

"bigger, brighter, better offices on the scale envisaged by the PIU report".

Remaining sub-postmasters in the urban network believe that they will need to improve earnings by between 25 and 33 per cent. a year; otherwise, they will not be able to stay and make that matching investment in their businesses that the Minister talked about.

Mrs. Browning: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Robathan: Yes, but the Minister spoke for half an hour and I want others to have a chance to participate in the debate.

Mrs. Browning: There is a problem for the remaining sub-postmasters in urban areas who want to invest a large amount of capital. Is my hon. Friend as concerned as I am that the Government have yet to tell us their intentions regarding the Crown office network, which is centrally funded? When the Labour Government first entered office, their declared policy was to increase the number of Crown offices. Given that they are starting to close private businesses, is it not about time that they put the Crown offices into the private sector as well?

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend reveals the lack of coherence in the Government's approach towards the Post Office.

Postwatch has also highlighted the fear that urban reinvention will benefit only the multiples and that it will serve to squeeze out small business men. If so, what guarantee can the Government give that multiples, such as supermarkets, will not then reorganise and close the post office branch in the multiple—as happened in the

Ripon Co-op in March? Last week, the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters conference passed a motion stating:

"This conference demands Her Majesty's Government take immediate action to avert the collapse of the nationwide network of post offices".

Is the federation scaremongering, or is a collapse likely?

I recall how, as a Parliamentary Private Secretary, one could sit in on meetings and know what Ministers' genuine thoughts were, even if one's own contributions were not always listened to. It was therefore with some concern that I learned that on 4 September, at a meeting of Cheddleton parish council, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins), who was until recently a PPS at the DTI, said that

"The decision as to any individual post office staying open or closing was purely a commercial decision by the owner of the business",

and that

"Government money would not be used to support uneconomic offices".

If true, that tends to undermine everything the Government are saying about post offices in urban deprived areas—and, indeed, the rural network. Furthermore, it seriously undermines any lingering faith that people involved in the Post Office might have in anything connected with Government policy.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters in Northern Ireland is extremely concerned about what they regard as unfair competition being created by Government agencies promoting high street bank accounts? Does he agree that the time has come for a review of the way in which Government agencies and Departments in Northern Ireland and elsewhere have promoted universal banking to benefit claimants?

Mr. Robathan: I agree entirely. That illustrates the lack of a coherent approach and an absence of understanding of what—in so-called joined-up government—all Departments could do to help the Post Office, if they wanted to.

Postcomm, the regulator, Postwatch, the protector of consumers and customers of the Post Office, the Post Office and Consignia themselves, the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters and the British public are all deeply concerned about Government policy for the Post Office. The order is about shrinking the urban network, but the crisis will remain because of the lack of a serious and coherent Government policy that would make the network sustainable. There is a crisis in the Post Office which deepens with each day that passes. Allan Leighton understands that, and it strikes me that he might be the best chance for the future of the Post Office, but if the crisis becomes a disaster, there is no doubt where the fault lies—at the feet of the Government.

We condemn the Government's delay and dithering for the past five years. It has led to uncertainty, confusion and distress among employees and sub-postmasters. The DTI has not persuaded other parts of the Government of the merits of its plans. The inadequate package before the House today does not include the measures necessary to give the Post Office a sustainable future, and for that reason we will oppose the motion.

7.18 pm

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): Unlike the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) I shall support the package before us this evening, even though I have some concerns about it.

Everyone present in the Chamber tonight values the sub-post offices. They are, as the Post Office's slogan says,

"An Essential Part of Everyday Life".

They are a service as well as a business. I recently spent a morning in one of my local sub-post offices. The experience convinced me of the extent to which the success of those businesses is based on sub-postmasters' knowledge of their customers, which they build up over the years. Sub-post offices are a focal point of community life, especially after the wholesale closure of so many branch banks in urban areas. I think that we would all endorse the description given by Commissioner Monti in his letter to the Government about the package. He writes:

"Besides being more physically accessible by those living in deprived and remote areas, Post Office Limited—unlike most banks—is widely trusted by those un-banked benefit recipients targeted by"

the universal banking system.

The network of sub-post offices is a national asset, and we should value it properly. But it has been dogged, for months and years, even before 1997, by rumour and uncertainty, which affects sub-postmasters—our constituents—and their customers, who are also our constituents. The questions have come thick and fast. "Will I still be able to get cash over the counter?" We have dealt with that issue at last, quite rightly, by guaranteeing that people will get cash over the counter, but I have some questions about the method by which that will be done. Sub-postmasters are asking about the way in which the Post Office has approached consultation with them in the past few months. I am not sure how helpful the Post Office's approach has been. For instance, sub-postmasters have been asked to accept compensation and go or, if they prefer, invest in their businesses or consider taking over a business that may be closing. However, sub-postmasters in my constituency have recently asked me, for instance, how the compensation package will operate in relation to tax. There has been no clarity on that question whatever.

Will the sums available to invest take local factors into account, as £10,000 will probably go a lot further in some parts of the country than in Brighton and Hove, part of which I represent? Many of those sub-post offices are in small buildings, which are constrained because they are of Victorian or Edwardian design and are in the city centre—modernisation may need a lot more investment than £10,000, even when matched by the sub-postmaster. What will happen if someone transfers from one sub-post office to another? Will they be able, for instance, to take their lottery point with them if they move from one premises to another? There is a lack of

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clarity about many basic business questions that the sub-postmasters must consider when responding to the Post Office consultation that began in April.

There is public uncertainty as well. People want to know the future of their own sub-post office. Tonight's package will at least move us out of that uncertainty because we now have agreement on the funding that is needed. I am glad that the decisions to be made when consultation is completed will take into account issues such as the social make-up of the area, its age profile, geography, the availability of public transport and so on. However, I wonder whether the proposed one-month period of consultation will be long enough, and I am seeking guarantees about the way in which it will be publicised in the locality. It is not enough just to know who will be written to formally—we need to know about publicity on consultation as well.

A vital part of the Post Office's role will be the universal banking system. There is genuine concern about the failure to realise the full potential of the post office card scheme, which is a way of ensuring that cash can be provided over the counter and, as Age Concern says, could be a great budgeting aid, as people will not need to draw out all their pension or benefit in one go. Why, however, are many obstacles being placed in the way of sub-postmasters? Yes, it is good business for them, if they can attract customers, but why are obstacles preventing them from publicising and encouraging the take-up of the post card scheme? They have been told in the document issued by the Post Office that they must not advise their customers on what method of banking to use. There is also a complicated system in which customers must phone a helpline for a telephone consultation, then receive a personal introduction document or whatever before they can open an account. We are talking about many elderly customers who may be hard of hearing or may not be good at detailed telephone conservations of that type. Why cannot sub-postmasters undertake the business of signing people up to an account over the counter?

Most sub-postmasters are franchisees. At the weekend, one of my sub-postmasters asked me to imagine McDonald's, a franchised business, launching a new range, then forbidding people in their franchises to publicise it. There is some justice in that description of the way in which the Post Office is tying the hands of sub-postmasters, preventing them from fully realising a system which, as I have said, could be of real benefit to many customers in deprived parts of the country who, for whatever reason, do not have bank accounts. It will help them in their budgeting and, indeed, ensure the security of their money.

The PIU report argued that the Post Office should develop a role for post offices as Government general practitioners. We have heard tonight that the "Your Guide" scheme is not to be pursued in its piloted form, but I believe that the Minister said that the Government still pay allegiance to the notion of the Post Office as their general practitioner. I am pleased about that and look forward to hearing more about the way in which that role will develop; by developing that role we will continue to ensure that the Post Office remains an essential part of our everyday life.

7.26 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): The Minister got off to a good start by opening with the issue on which there is broad consensus—the PIU report, which includes the urban reinvention programme and the restructuring to which we have all, in different ways, signed up. He then rather recklessly called in aid the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, citing the paper that it distributed to us all for this evening's debate. At the risk of detaining the House, I remind him that the NFSP said in its introductory sentences that over the past two years

"sub post offices have continued to close at an alarming rate, morale throughout the network is at an all-time low and pay negotiations have been suspended over a serious dispute with the proposed new contract from Post Office Limited."

It says specifically of the Government's role:

"Of the 24 recommendations made by the . . . PIU, very few have been implemented: funding has not been delivered despite being promised; the timescales for implementation of recommendations have slipped further; the development of new roles for subpostmasters has ground to a halt; and there is widespread stagnation and inactivity across a wide range of the recommendations."

This afternoon's written answer, which the Minister confirmed, showed that the NFSP was being rather optimistic, as we have now lost the rollout of "Your Guide", which was an essential part of the process recommended by the PIU. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) held out some hope that the GP concept has survived, but it is difficult to see how it can do so, as "Your Guide" was at its heart.

The Government said that "Your Guide" is not cost-effective or delivering services, but I do not know whether the Minister knows that the Post Office itself has produced a pamphlet which says on the front,

"Your Guide: Something for everyone . . . it's brilliant".

It goes on to say that it is "a life saver" which

"opens up a whole new world",

and says —

"You don't know what you're missing"

in

"a chest of hidden treasures".

Clearly, that is a promotional document, but the chairman of the Post Office, no less, claimed that the success of the project

"is vital to the future of the network of Post Office branches".

He went on to describe how, in relation to Government services, the pilot project was producing new jobs—people were finding jobs and receiving benefit entitlements. I appreciate that a former Treasury Minister may not regard helping people to get benefit entitlements as an achievement but, none the less, the Post Office's evidence suggests that the scheme was highly successful on its own terms. Someone's head should therefore roll; the Minister responsible has gone off to the Cabinet Office. The Secretary of State, who was so committed to the project that the pilot took place in her own constituency, has not turned up, and the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness is being asked to take the rap. It is a fiasco.

I come specifically to the sums of money on which we have been asked to vote. Let us remind ourselves that, of the £210 million specifically for urban reinvention, £180

million is specifically for compensation and redundancy. Only £30 million is for new investment, and there is a maximum of £10,000 per post office. If one wants to go further, there is no funding to do so. More importantly—the Minister carefully avoided mentioning this—the sub-postmaster must come up with match funding. How will any sub-postmaster raise a loan against a falling revenue stream in order to match the fund's £10,000 commitment? That simply will not happen. This urban reinvention will not take place. Will the Minister tell us in his reply what has already happened to the—I think—£30 million that has been pledged to inner-city deprived areas? As I understand it, very little of that money—if any—has yet been spent. That is the track record of urban reinvention in inner-city areas.

In many ways, the problem is even worse because the assumption on which the calculations are made is that a third of urban post offices will close. I have a letter from a sub-postmaster who speaks on behalf of Manchester sub-postmasters telling me that 60 per cent. of Manchester sub-post offices are planning to close. We are therefore facing a third closing with the Government's compensation package, a third continuing without compensation but not making money, and a third carrying the weight of the business.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I share the hon. Gentleman's general concern about people being able to reinvest, but I know of an enterprising sub-postmaster who has linked up with one of the minor supermarket chains and reinvented his store. It has now become a major focus for the community in which I live. He has either found the money from the bank, with the backing of the chain, or has found it directly from the chain with which he is partnered.

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman describes an interesting trend, which I have seen. He is talking about post offices housed in Londis seven-11 stores. It is an interesting idea and if it works I shall be delighted for the people concerned, but he may not be aware that the National Association of Convenience Stores has said that the arrangement is very unsatisfactory. Many such stores are trying out the idea, but they have no commitment to the customers as postmasters did, and there have already been several examples in both convenience stores and supermarkets of post offices closing with little consultation. The idea is interesting, but the evidence so far is that it is not a solution to the problem.

The reason that that is not a solution to the problem—this goes to the heart of the business and answers the question that we have been asking ever since the Government announced automated credit transfer—is that we do not know where the £400 million income that post offices will lose as a result of ACT will come from. We now know that it will not be from "Your Guide". It was hoped that they would at least get something from the universal banking provisions and particularly the post office card accounts.

The Conservative spokesman correctly touched on the mounting evidence that Departments other than the Department of Trade and Industry, especially the Department for Work and Pensions, are, with Treasury backing, actively discouraging applicants from using the post office card accounts. They are actively sabotaging the work of the Minister's Department. This is a very serious matter.

I have here a pack that is being issued to people who want tax credits. It is very complicated; I honestly do not know how people who have problems of financial exclusion can cope with this plastic pack which contains many documents. On the page on which it deals with payments, it says that if somebody wants their credit to be paid into a bank, they must simply supply their sort code and account number. However, if they want a Post Office payment, they are advised to go to page 36 of the explanatory notes. I eventually found the explanatory notes and page 36 where it next instructed claimants to ring the helpline. We tried to do so but could not get an answer. That is the kind of maze of bureaucratic instruction that people are beginning to encounter if they try to use a post office card account.

If one wants a bank account, one just fills in a form. If one wants a post office card account, one has to be interviewed.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Have my hon. Friend's constituents raised similar concerns to those raised with me about how during such interviews they feel pressurised not to take up the card account?

Dr. Cable: I have indeed; I have spoken to some people about the pressure that is being exerted. Hon. Members should prepare themselves to encounter this in their constituency surgeries. People are being told that if they go for a post office card account, the cash will arrive a month late. They lose a month's liquidity. I have discussed the matter with young women who have been split from their partners—this is even more disreputable—when talking to them about arrangements for the working families tax credit. They have been told that they are best to go through a bank otherwise the tax credit will be paid to their partners—losing all the benefits of the enfranchisement of women that the tax credits were supposed to create. Those are the kind of tricks that Department for Work and Pensions officials are getting up to—bullying people into giving up their opportunities to use the Post Office.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Has my hon. Friend heard the complaints from sub-postmasters that I have heard in my constituency that it is staggering that even at this stage no information is being made available in accessible form either by the Government or the Post Office about how the card account will work? That reinforces the pressures that he is discussing.

Dr. Cable: Indeed; there is no proper explanation. The people who are promoting the migration are well informed of the benefits of using banks because they set them out. Draft material from the Department for Work and Pensions sets out in argued form why people should enjoy advantages by using a bank, but does not explain—the Minister did not either—that people on low incomes are subject to extremely high charges if, for example, they fall foul of standing order provisions. The presentation is entirely one-sided. All that the postmasters have been asking for is even-handed treatment. They are not asking for preference or protection. All they are saying is that the relative merits

[Dr. Cable]

of a post office account and a bank account should be dealt with even-handedly and that people should be given an equal opportunity to use one or the other.

On top of that—the Minister knows about this although he did not refer to it—there are serious problems concerning both groups of sub-post offices. First, there are the modified sub-post offices—larger units that are often staffed by ex-Post Office employees. Many are in an appalling financial position as a result of the type of contracts under which they operate, which often do not even cover their staff. I met a group of people representing modified sub-post offices in Yorkshire a couple of months ago. Their position is parlous. As the smaller units close with urban reinvention, such post offices are expected to carry the burden, but they are not in a position to do so.

The other group of sub-post offices, as the Minister should have acknowledged, is currently in the middle of a serious dispute over the terms of their contracts. The federation representing them has said that the entire reinvention programme is "hanging by a thread" owing to the lack of certainty over their contractual future. The position is very serious.

My final point concerns the mechanism used when post office closures occur. Several Labour Members have asked with an open mind for assurances. They have said that they accept that closures must occur but that they want to be assured that there is a proper appeal procedure and that local councillors and Members of Parliament will be consulted. That is fine, but let us look at the evidence put forward by the consumer protection body Postwatch. It has been clear from the beginning that it did not see a justification for 3,000 closures and that that was way in excess of what was required. It has however said that it will help with individual cases, judging the viability of particular post offices. It can only deal with three or four such cases at any time, not 3,000. It will be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of closures.

When such matters are dealt with properly and carefully, sensible decisions can be made. In the past few weeks, the Post Office has gone back on a closure at Child's Hill in London as a result of Postwatch intervention. If a closure programme is carried out gradually, carefully and slowly, it can be managed, and restructuring can take place, but the Government's scheme will bring about a disorderly collapse and cause a great deal of harm.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): May I tell the hon. Gentleman how much I agree that the present Post Office management is highly unlikely to be able to handle efficiently the 3,000 closures envisaged? In the largest town in North-West Leicestershire, the largest post office, which was part of a superstore, collapsed about nine months ago, and has still not been reopened, despite its importance to the largest town in the constituency. I do not know how the Post Office will be able to handle 3,000 closures, and I very much doubt that that will happen.

Dr. Cable: That is a helpful intervention. Within six to nine months, every hon. Member will have such anecdotes.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): The hon. Gentleman referred to the sub-post office in Child's Hill, which is to be reopened, mainly because 1,000 letters were sent by residents to Postwatch, and Postwatch has been extremely helpful. However, 12 post offices in London are under threat, and they are all run by temporary sub-postmasters, none of whom will get a penny in compensation.

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman has exposed a new type of problem, which I had not anticipated. Large numbers of post offices—those that fall outside the 3,000—will not be compensated, and many of them are in financial distress already.

To summarise, the Minister's initial commitment to the performance and innovation unit report was right, but what is happening is disastrously far from it. The central weakness in the Government's approach is their inability to give the postmasters any hope of finding alternative income streams. What is so utterly disreputable about it is that postmasters are in the middle of a battle between two Government Departments, one of which is simply concerned with saving money in the short term, without any regard to the wider financial or social implications, and the other, the hapless Department of Trade and Industry, which is carrying the can for it.

7.42 pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): I shall keep my remarks brief, as this is such a short debate and so many hon. Members want to come in. Many good points have been made so far, particularly by my hon. Friends.

Like many, I welcome additional money for local post offices, and efforts to improve the services available and increase the customer base, but I have two concerns. First, I have 25 local post offices in the hilly town of Dunfermline and my overall constituency of west Fife. Nine have been classified as urban; one of those nine is a main branch in the town centre, and of the remaining eight, a number are within a mile of that main branch office, yet they are vital centres in their communities—for instance, the branches in Abbeyview and Brucefield.

On the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), will the Minister give a commitment that we will be able to have longer than a month for consultation if that is desired and necessary to involve all members of the community, and that full consultation will take place, the level of local deprivation will be taken into account, and the community role of the local post office branch will be carefully considered, along with the circumstances of each locality?

The second issue, which I raise in connection with urban post offices, although it also affects rural ones, is the decline in counter payments. There are various reasons. One which particularly angers me is that those

who seek to pay their bills promptly and in cash at their local post office often pay more than they would if they paid through direct debit. I have raised with the Secretary of State the fact that private utility companies and others give discounts to those who pay by direct debit, but charge more to those who decide to keep paying in cash. I recently found out that Girobank has failed to reach an agreement with Fife council in respect of council tax payments, so people who pay their council tax at local post offices end up paying £1.15 more than the figure on their council tax bill.

Such charges, combined with the Government's drive to persuade people to open bank accounts, hits local post offices hard. Many of my constituents have managed on a budget all their lives by having cash in one hand, paying their bills straight away and seeing in the other hand what they have left to spend. Will the Minister take action to tackle the disadvantages experienced by those who still prefer to pay their bills in cash? Will he think again about replacing order books with complex procedures, unfamiliar smart cards and PIN numbers, which are not welcomed by many of my older constituents, who have never had and never wanted a bank account or a smart card?

Like many, I look forward to having detailed discussions with my local sub-postmasters and postmistresses in the months ahead. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to them for the vital service that they provide to our communities.

7.46 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): As time for the debate is disgracefully short, I shall try to make just three points about this strangely named and very costly measure.

First, when the Government announced that it would be compulsory for pensioners and other vulnerable people to have their pensions and benefits paid into the bank rather than through the Post Office, they pretended that they could save taxpayers' money and still maintain a comprehensive network of sub-post offices. The measure demonstrates that they were wrong. They should have known that they would be wrong. As Secretary of State, I was advised that if we moved in the direction of making compulsory payments through the banks, that would lead to the collapse of the sub-post office network, unless we decided to subsidise it, in which case the subsidies would absorb most, if not all, of the savings that we hoped to make.

Although I have given them the opportunity, the Government have never denied that they received similar advice from their officials. They should have realised that they were faced with that dilemma, because post offices benefit in two ways from their contract to deliver benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions. They receive £400 million as payment, and they receive many millions of pounds of extra trade from people who enter their post offices and spend their benefits in them. The Government can therefore make good the loss of revenue from cancelling the contract only by paying out more than they are saving by withdrawing the £400 million.

My second point is that if the Government are reluctant to do that, as they clearly are, they are faced with the collapse of the sub-post office network. They are trying to conceal that collapse not by reinventing the network, but by reinventing the English language. They have replaced the word "closure" with "reinvention". They propose to reinvent 3,000 post offices as fast food chains or estate agents' offices or by returning them to residential use. They intend to reinvent 3,000 sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses into early retirement by paying them to give up their franchises. They are going to reinvent many thousands of people who work in those post offices by taking away their jobs and reinventing them into unemployment. That is what the Government's strange wording means, and we should have no truck with it.

Meanwhile, as well as closing 3,000 of the 8,000 urban post offices, according to the Postcomm survey, over the past 12 months rural post offices have been closing at three times the rate of urban post offices, and 74 per cent. of post offices which have closed over the past 12 months have been rural post offices.

The third point is that the Government are still a long, long way from closing the financial gap that they have opened up in the viability of the post office network. The Consignia document that was sent to us a year or so ago states that the gap is £500million. Consignia said that it could make good £100 million of that money by closing stores and reducing operating costs. Presumably, the Government's way of helping Consignia to achieve that £100 million saving is the paying out of up to £210 million in the early years. I do not understand their arithmetic; they talk about a figure of £10,000 for each post office, but the closure of 3,000 stores at a cost of £210 million is a cost of £70,000 each. If the amount is spread evenly among all 8,000 post offices, the total is £26,000 each. Will the Minister explain the bizarre arithmetic of the proposal? Anyway, at the end of the day, there is an ongoing saving of £100 million.

The Post Office said that the Government gateway, which has since been rechristened several times in Blairite fashion, was going to raise £80 million a year. We are now told that it does not raise anything and costs more than it saves or generates in income, and it has disappeared. We were told in press releases that the universal bank would cost the banks £180 million, so we hoped that the money would go into the sub-post office network. On closer inspection, it turns out that there is a five-year period and that the amount is £36 million a year. As the National Consumer Council points out, that is effectively a cost to bank users and a form of taxation without legislation. Anyway, £36 million a year is a small amount. The only other sum that the Post Office quantifies relates to its conversion into a total distribution system, whatever that means. That will generate all of £6 million a year in extra revenue.

Whence will the extra money come to fill the £500 million gap? Newspaper reports over the weekend or yesterday said that the Government were going to put £450 million into rural post offices. We are not discussing that issue today, but if the Minister has leaked the information to the press, we would at least expect him to tell the House whether there is any truth in the assertions and whether, as the newspapers reported, £150 million a year for three years is to come from the Government in taxpayers' money. Perhaps he no longer holds himself accountable to the House and we are to be informed of such issues only through nods and winks to the newspapers.

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

The truth is that the Government have foolishly entered into a policy that is not compatible with the objectives that they have set themselves. There will be either minimal savings or maximal closures, and certainly great distress and inconvenience to pensioners and vulnerable people in all our constituencies. That is why many thousands of people in my constituency have signed petitions urging the Government to reconsider this daft and damaging policy.

7.52 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I want to express a number of concerns about the programme and to seek some reassurances from the Minister.

We are being asked to support a package that appears to involve spending about £210 million on what is, in effect, a closure programme. I am extremely concerned that the whole programme appears to be led by the aim of compensating those running sub-post offices for loss of business rather than that of supporting the business of the sub-post offices in continuing to meet the needs of mainly excluded communities.

In my constituency, a large number of sub-post offices—some 23 of them—are at risk. I was reassured by the Minister's answer to my earlier question, in which he stated that an additional £15 million would be available to support those post offices. Before voting in support of the motion, however, I should like to have more information about that £15 million and about the £30 million that has already been mentioned.

I accept that something must be done and that the situation that we face has not arisen in the past few years but is the product of years of neglect by those who were in control in the past. Nevertheless, those of us who represent deprived communities are acutely aware of the impact that the closure of post offices and sub-post offices would have on our already suffering populations. Post offices in deprived urban areas are as important as those in rural areas. They are often a lifeline to the poor and excluded, and provide services not only in terms of essential benefits, but by assisting people in paying bills, getting information, obtaining important forms, securing licences, conducting money transfers and many other important activities. The importance of post offices in deprived urban areas goes beyond that and often relates to the businesses alongside them. Such businesses will not necessarily be located in the same building. The livelihood of essential retail businesses that are situated near post offices often depends on people going to post offices and spending their money nearby.

I hope that the Government will ensure that the future of our sub-post offices is seen in the context of dealing with social exclusion. Will the Minister again give me a clear assurance that the future of our post offices and sub-post offices will be seen in terms of providing essential services and important issues of social exclusion?

I am also concerned about the consultation process and the role of Postwatch, which covers extremely wide areas. I was extremely concerned to discover that Postwatch's northern sector includes areas as diverse as Carlisle, Newcastle, Sheffield, Lincoln, Preston, Liverpool and Manchester. Many millions of consumers are represented in that area, and I should like an assurance that Postwatch will be able to conduct itself so as to take heed of the views of people in those areas. I should also like an assurance that, when the future of individual post offices and sub-post offices is considered, the Government will ensure that a proper consultation is carried out and that no given number of offices will be set down for closure irrespective of circumstances.

In short, I recognise that the Government face a very difficult problem and that something has to be done, but I want assurances that the issue of deprived communities such as mine in central Liverpool will be given full attention and that the programme will be led not by compensating people who wish to leave the business, but by the need to ensure continuation of services for those who are in need.

7.56 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): In this world of Labour spin, it will surprise neither the House nor the Minister to find that the current Department of Trade and Industry website makes the remarkable claim that the Government aim to ensure that the

"nationwide network of post office counters can continue to flourish".

Why is that network not flourishing and why are record closures occurring? The answer is the Government's staggeringly inept performance in introducing automated credit transfers without a parallel programme to provide revenue and support to our sub-post offices. After the consequences have finally sunk in for the Government and the Department, they have been running around like headless chickens trying to find means to prop up the sub-post office network. The answer is there in the shape of the universal bank, but it is still not up and running and I grave doubts about whether it will be in time, before the guillotine of the ACT falls.

The Government calculated that there would be 3 million post office card accounts, but 16 million people go into post offices every week. That implies that there will be a reduction of 13 million people, but what will happen as a result? The revenue of sub-post offices will fall and they will pack up. No wonder half of them want to get out of the business—and it is this Government's fault.

7.58 pm

Mr. Timms: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have had an interesting debate. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) for his kind words at the beginning of his speech and for his apology about disagreeing with some of the points that I made. I was puzzled by his conclusion, however, as he said that he regretted that there had been delay and he wanted uncertainty to end,

but he also told us that he would lead Opposition Members in voting against the measure that will ensure precisely the certainty for which he called. If he reconsiders the briefing of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, he will see that the last thing it wants is the blocking of the compensation that he urged his hon. Friends to support.

Mr. Robathan *rose—*

Mr. Timms: Given the short time available, I should like to continue.

The hon. Gentleman complained about inadequate publicity for "Your Guide". I am grateful to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) for drawing hon. Members' attention to the good publicity for "Your Guide" that the Post Office used. The post office in Leicestershire used in-store marketing, articles in the local press and leafleting. The matter was also well covered on local radio. However, the conclusions were those that I set out.

The hon. Member for Blaby made a point that it is important to correct. He suggested that there would be a limit of 3 million post office card accounts. That is not the case; I assure him that there is no such limit. However, I share his confidence in Allan Leighton as chairman of the Post Office and in the vigour with which the organisation is pursuing its bid to return to profitability.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) made some important points. I want to stress that I agree with him and with my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) about the important social role of urban sub-post offices. That is why we are supporting a careful, planned programme of change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion, however, asked why it could not be left to sub-postmasters to persuade people to take up post office card accounts. Many people who do not currently have bank accounts, for the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) outlined, would be better off if they did, so that, for example, they could pay bills by direct debit. That may not be the sub-postmaster's calculation. It is therefore important that people have access to advice about their options—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16.*

The House divided: Ayes 271, Noes 170.

Division No. 320] **[8:01 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Cairns, David
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
David, Wayne
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
MacShane, Denis
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain

McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pound, Stephen
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe Lunesdale)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E Lochaber)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Jim Murphy

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns Kincardine)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House authorises the Secretary of State to pay, by way of financial assistance under section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 in respect of the urban post office reinvention programme, a sum exceeding £10 million to Post Office Limited.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you are in a position to advise, guide or help us. We have had an extraordinary day, in which we have, quite rightly, had three important statements from the Government, which took a great deal of time. Mr. Speaker and your colleagues were correct to allow Members to take part in the questioning until 6 o'clock or thereafter. We have had subsequent business, and we are about to discuss a relatively uncontroversial but important measure and to give it its Third Reading. Then, we shall come to what we all supposed to be the main business of the day. It is quite clear that, because Mr. Speaker has imposed a 10-minute limit on all speeches in all debates, a great many Members want to take part in that debate. The matter affects all our constituencies in the greater part of the United Kingdom and rumour has it that about 60 Members have applied to Mr. Speaker to be called to speak. It does not take a mathematician of genius to work out that 10 minutes multiplied by 60 will be significantly longer than the hour or so that Back Benchers will have to speak in that debate. As this is such a crucial issue, affecting so many Members in all parts of England, and as it could equally well be debated on another day, would you, Sir, be in a position to invite the Leader of the House or his deputy to make a business statement so that we can defer consideration of the local government finance formula grant distribution until another day?

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A number of hon. Members on the Government side seem to find some cause for amusement in the point that my hon. Friend has raised. Many people outside the House will not understand our procedures, but it is right that they should understand them and their implications. The Order Paper reads:

"Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Bill [*Lords*]: As amended in the Standing Committee, to be considered. Third Reading may also be taken. Debate may continue until 10.00 p.m."

It goes on to describe the Adjournment debate:

"Local Government Finance Formula Grant Distribution. Debate may continue until 10.00 p.m."

Those outside the House may not realise that the Report stage is the only opportunity that the House will have to consider the matters in the Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Bill that were considered in Committee, apart from the Third Reading, which is also scheduled for today's Sitting. Those matters may well, therefore, take us until about 10 o'clock, and the very important Adjournment debate on local government finance could get no time at all. This is a serious matter, and I strongly urge you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to support the point put to you by my hon. Friend.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Let me try to answer the points that have been raised. I should point out that a ruling has already been given from the Chair earlier this afternoon in the light of these same considerations. The Chair has absolutely no power to require any Minister to come to the House; nor has it any power or control over the business that is put down for consideration this day. The Chair is aware of the difficulties that have arisen because a number of important matters came up earlier in the day, It is, however, a matter for the Government or the usual channels if there is to be any reconsideration of the order of business for the day.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have a unique position in the House in your capacity as Chairman of Ways and Means, and you therefore have a unique influence on matters financial. You will, therefore, be aware that we are now in a doubly paradoxical position. Not only was it originally intended that this important matter of local government finance be dealt with on a debate for the Adjournment, which might have been bad enough, but we now see the prospect of that debate shrinking by the minute before our very eyes and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) suggested, there is a danger that it might disappear altogether.

My appeal to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker is this. Bearing in mind what you have just said, would you be prepared, together with Mr. Speaker, to give serious consideration to having discussions with the Leader of the House to see whether you can reassure the House that you will protect us from this diminution of the ability of the House properly to discharge its responsibilities in the important matter of local government finance? Otherwise, where do we turn? Are we now completely at the mercy of the Government, who are manipulating the business so that this important matter cannot properly be considered? We appeal to you for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is nothing that the Chair can do immediately about the situation with which we are faced as a result of the amount of business that is down for consideration by the House this day. Mr. Speaker is, of course, the protector of Back-Bench interests, and he will have observed what has happened today. Obviously, I cannot speak directly for him, but I imagine that, with his traditional concern for these matters, this issue might form part of the routine discussions in which he is frequently involved.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It may be for the convenience of the House if I say that we fully understand the importance that many hon. Members attach to the business that is to be taken later tonight. I also understand entirely that many Members from both sides of the House wish to contribute to the debate. It was necessary for the House to hear the statements that we heard this afternoon, and I do not think that any reasonable Member would object to those statements, which, necessarily, have taken time. We will look for another opportunity to extend the debate that will start tonight so that more Members may contribute to it.

[Mr. Robin Cook]

[HON. MEMBERS: "In the Chamber?"] Whether it will be in the Chamber or in Westminster Hall is a matter that we will have to consider.

Mr. Forth: Oh!

Mr. Cook: It is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman objects to that. Half of all the next 10 days are Opposition days. If the Opposition wish to substitute the debate for one of those days, I will consider that request sympathetically.

Mr. Forth: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not sure whether that was a point of order or a business statement. It sounded very like the latter to me, in which case it is subject to the usual procedures of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must make it plain that I took the Leader of the House's comments as being further to the point of order that is being considered.

Mr. Forth: I do genuinely appreciate what the Leader of the House has said and his sensitive appreciation of the difficulties that we face, but it would be helpful to Mr. Speaker and to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and you have generously indicated that you will take a lively interest in the issue—and to all of us if we could tease out of the Leader of the House whether he is prepared to consider proper time for a proper debate on this important financial matter on the Floor of the House and not to set a precedent by shoving the matter off to Westminster Hall where, with the best will in the world, it cannot be properly considered and given the weight that it would be given in the Chamber. I hope that the Leader of the House will not start using—I might even say abusing—Westminster Hall as some sort of cheap overflow for important business that has been squeezed by the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The continuing discussion of the matter is, of course, taking away from the time that will be available. There may still be an opportunity for the usual channels to have some communication while the House proceeds with the next item of business. The Chair is not able to do anything other than proceed with the business that is set down for discussion. I suggest that it would be as well to move on to that.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to prolong this discussion, but when you consider this matter—as you have kindly said that you will—you might remember that in all the time that I was the Secretary of State dealing with these matters we always had a full day's debate on what was the annual discussion of them, not the fundamental change that we have before us tonight. I hope that you will not underestimate the importance of this debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I cannot continue the discussion by means of points of order, especially as they are getting slightly wide of the issue. I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concern. Indeed, I understand the concern of the House, but I cannot unilaterally alter the business of the House in any way. I am a servant of the House and ensure simply that the business is conducted. Those points having been made—I am sure that Mr. Speaker has taken note of them—it would be best to proceed with the day's business.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a different point of order, although it is linked to the previous one. Can you help me and, I hope, the House? If the next item of business runs until 10 o'clock, the debate on local government finance will have no time at all. Does that mean that the House will have no opportunity to debate a matter of considerable importance to almost every hon. Member? I say that in the presence of the Leader of the House, for whom I have the utmost respect. He has sought to make the procedures of the House more relevant and transparent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that I would always go out of my way to assist the hon. Gentleman, but I cannot comment on a hypothesis.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wished to thank the Leader of the House on behalf of the Liberal Democrats for his comments. We have this debate every time that local government expenditure is discussed on the Floor of the House. We never have enough time to debate it. It comprises a quarter of all Government expenditure, so I hope that the Leader of the House will accept that this debate needs more time than it is given, as does the local government settlement every year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made his point, but it is not one on which I can rule.

Orders of the Day

Public Trustee (Liability and Fees) Bill
[Lords]

Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Order for Third Reading read.

8.25 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Right hon. and hon. Members will know that this is a short but important Bill affecting the work of the Public Trustee and his office. I am pleased to say that the Bill has received support from both sides of the House. In essence, the Bill makes changes to the Public Trustee Act 1906 in two areas. It removes the requirement for full cost recovery for trust work in order to prevent the large increase in fees that the current provisions would necessitate. The Bill also amends the 1906 Act to make the Lord Chancellor responsible for fees in respect of the Public Trustee's work, rather than the current formula which places that responsibility with the Treasury—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order for the House to come to order so that those of us who are interested in the Bill can hear what the Minister is saying?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am ever grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that the House has heard his words.

Ms Winterton: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Will the Minister tell the House how many representations she has received from individuals, organisations or trustees about the Government's proposals?

Ms Winterton: As far as I am aware, we have received no representations other than the thoughtful and considered responses from hon. Members.

The Bill also repeals section 7 of the 1906 Act, which relates to the liability of the consolidated fund for liabilities arising from the activities of the Public Trustee and provides that for the future, were such liabilities to arise, they should be met from the Lord Chancellor's Department's estimate. The Bill also tidies up provisions on the Public Trustee's liability to beneficiaries. In preparing the Bill, we found that the purported exception to the Public Trustee's liability to beneficiaries in section 7 of the Public Trustee Act 1906 had no legal effect and thus serves no purpose. We have taken this opportunity to remove it.

Throughout the passage of the Bill, both sides of the House have acknowledged its importance and, in Committee, we had a constructive debate that did justice to the issues and the context in which they arise. Following that discussion, I wrote to all members of the Committee to clarify the role of the Official Solicitor and the Public Trustee.

Mr. Allen: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the way in which she handled the Committee stage. She made a complicated matter clear, even to a non-lawyer such as myself. She made several points about a case of great concern in my constituency—that of the Strelley social club and the amount of money that needs to be disbursed to former members. She was very sympathetic, which was much appreciated in my constituency. Will she take this opportunity to briefly update the House on the position in the case at the moment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Lady replies to that point, it might be helpful if I inform the House that a large firework display will take place across the river at any moment. It might cause loud noises and I would not wish the House to be confused about the cause of any disturbance.

Ms Rosie Winterton: I should expect nothing less during the course of my speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) is as assiduous as ever in raising his constituents' concerns. I believe that 1,800 former members of the Strelley social club have been written to, and that about 1,000 have replied. Staff will look at the replies to sort out who will benefit from the residue of that fund.

I should also like to pay tribute to all those hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee and spoke on Second Reading. They drew attention to the work of the Public Trustee in dealing with the affairs of very vulnerable people, and in ensuring that the fee regime does not bear unduly harshly on them because of outdated legislative arrangements. I have appreciated the interest and good humour with which our proceedings have been conducted.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) noted the speed at which the Bill had passed through the other place. He has been replaced by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). We in this House have, rightly, spent a little more time on the Bill than was the case in the other place, but I hope that we can all agree that this modest Bill is worthwhile. I am happy to commend it to the House.

8.31 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I can certainly welcome what the Minister has said about the Bill's importance. I thank her for her welcome to me, although I am returning to old haunts in reassuming my present role, as I have previously been Opposition spokesman for Lord Chancellor's Department matters. After a year's absence, I have that responsibility again, and I am delighted to be associated with the latter stages of this important Bill.

However, the Minister will know that some concerns have been expressed about the Bill. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) intervened earlier to ask about constituency issues, and my hon. Friend the

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) has inquired about matters arising from reports from the Select Committee on Public Accounts compiled under various Chairmen, among them my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis).

I have also encountered a case in my constituency that is not dissimilar to the one mentioned earlier in the Bill's passage through the House by the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer). On behalf of those of my constituents who have been affected, I have expressed to one of the Minister's predecessors my concerns about the hugely long time it has taken the Office of the Public Trustee to respond to inquiries. I therefore take a particular interest in the changes that the Bill will make.

The Minister rightly said that there has been no dispute between the parties with regard to the Bill. The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) will speak for the Liberal Democrats on this matter this evening, and I am sure that he will confirm the statement by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) at an earlier stage of the Bill's passage through the House. That hon. Gentleman said that his party, both in this House and in another place, welcomed the Bill.

However, I want to raise a couple of further concerns. One is the confusion that may be caused to constituents by the renaming of the office. Those who have followed the passage of the Bill will know that, on 1 April this year, the office was relaunched as the Public Guardianship Office. As it turns out, however, the same person will occupy the twin roles of Official Solicitor and Public Trustee.

The Minister rightly said that the Bill transfers financial responsibility from the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Lord Chancellor. I do not have much confidence that the change will improve the efficiency with which matters will be handled in the future. My experience, as both a Front-Bench spokesman and a constituency MP, has been that the Lord Chancellor's Department does not respond as quickly as the Treasury when questions are asked of it. It would be useful if the Minister were to give a binding guarantee that constituents will not have to wait for months and months for correspondence even to be acknowledged by the new Public Guardianship Office and by the individual who will be both the Public Trustee and the Official Solicitor.

Also, if there are concerns in future about the operation of the Public Guardianship Office, I hope that the Minister's Department will respond with dispatch when hon. Members write on behalf of constituents. That was a huge concern under the old regime, before this Bill was introduced.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, North asked a question in relation to the Strelley social club. I do not think that it would help the debate if I were to take that further, but the Public Trustee has a responsibility to look after people who are often severely disabled as a result of the effects of pharmaceutical drugs. They are among the most vulnerable people in our society. The case in my constituency to which I referred earlier involved people trying to look after seriously disabled relatives whose financial assets were under the control of the Public Trustee. When dealing with such cases, it is vital to be able to get quick answers. Some of the cases can be complex, but there should at least be a rapid acknowledgement of any matters that are raised.

Ms Rosie Winterton *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hawkins: The Minister nods and I am grateful to her for acknowledging the problem.

I am also concerned about the size of the assets under the Public Trustee's control. We are talking about a very large amount of money. On Second Reading and in Standing Committee, the Minister gave general figures regarding the amount of money under the Public Trustee's management, but I hope that she will be able to give us in this debate the exact, up-to-date numbers. That will enable hon. Members who are not familiar with the Bill to see that we are talking about very considerable sums of money.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Would not the hon. Gentleman be interested in knowing the size of the office's work load, the number of cases that it has to deal with and the number of people available to deal with them? Knowledge of those figures would help to keep this debate brief.

Mr. Hawkins: The only figures that I have available were given to the House in the debate on 1 July this year, and they can be found in the *Hansard* report for that date. However, I agree that that is the sort of detail that the Minister should give the House this evening.

The PAC has reported on the various problems encountered by the Office of the Public Trustee in the past. In the debate on 1 July, my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton referred to the Department's quinquennial review. The review stated:

"Corporate development, business modernisation, high quality client service and comprehensive, reliable financial management information services have not materialised."

My hon. Friend remarked that that was

"Sir Humphrey-speak for a complete mess." —[*Official Report*, 1 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 49.]

I want the Minister to tell us that as a result of the changes that the Government are introducing in the Bill, that mess will be sorted out. There is a sorry history of poor management and lack of financial accountability. In its various reviews of this office, the Public Accounts Committee concluded that this was the worst aspect of Government that it had ever come across. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton rightly said, there is no mileage to be had from making vulnerable people pay for the mistakes of Whitehall.

In another place, Baroness Scotland said on 27 May:

"the accommodation and other overhead costs attributed to trust work increased significantly from 1st April 2001, while the income from trusts work has reduced".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 27 May 2002; Vol. 635, c. 1050.]

I would like the Minister's reassurance that the estates of vulnerable people, which are supposed to be looked after by the Public Trustee, will not, as a result of huge increases in charges from the Lord Chancellor's Department, be responsible for these overhead costs. I am always wary about seeing other people's money under the control of Whitehall bureaucrats. When the

matter was debated just before the summer recess, the Minister was asked specifically why the accommodation and overhead costs had increased dramatically. Having looked at the *Official Report*, I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton and others who raised that concern received a good enough answer.

Finally, although this is a welcome Bill that has received all-party support, I hope that the Minister will answer these important questions before we allow the measure to pass into law.

8.41 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I should declare that I am a lawyer, although I do not practise as such—[*Interruption.*] I am trying to get into everybody's good books right from the start. I welcome back the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins)—it is a pleasure to see him with us.

This is an uncontroversial Bill, which has been welcomed on both sides of the House and in the other place. Nevertheless, there are further points to be made arising out of it.

In the explanatory notes to the Bill, clause 8 appears to conflict with the note that the Minister sent to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 20 July 2002 which was circulated to all members of the Committee. The Minister's note makes it clear that the Public Trustee will continue to do trust work but that the trust work that it had been involved in on behalf of people with a mental incapacity was to be transferred to the Public Guardianship Office on 1 April 2001. That is a particularly inauspicious day for the clients of the Public Guardianship Office, and I shall refer to that in a moment. The Public Guardianship Office, it appears, operates under the aegis of the Official Solicitor.

The Minister will recall the debate that we had on 27 June 2002 when I and other hon. Members prayed against two statutory instruments. I opened the debate and set out, among other things, the complaints of a number of individuals, constituents and others, as to the inefficiency, delays and expense in dealing with the Public Guardianship Office. I have checked with some of my constituents and am told that unfortunately the performance of the Public Guardianship Office, far from improving, is still appalling.

My second point is about accountability. The Official Solicitor and the Public Trustee are two distinct legal bodies, although the same person, a Mr. Laurence Oates, is appointed to both statutory posts. The Minister has assured us that he receives just one salary and that it is paid at the appropriate civil service rates. In other words, he does not get two dollops. The two statutory offices continue to exist separately but are currently held by the same person. I should like the Minister outline to the House—or, better still, write to me—[*Interruption.*] She can circulate the letter to other Members who are interested in this riveting matter. Will she let me know why a new single statutory post should not be created, combining both that of the Official Solicitor and the Public Trustee? What are the advantages of having the two posts, especially as both are held by the same person?

It would assist the House if the Minister were to explain in her letter exactly what cost savings would result from creating a new single statutory post. In that letter, would she also outline what personnel are currently employed in management posts in the two offices and the approximate savings that would be achieved if they were combined?

As I said earlier, the Bill is welcome as far as it goes, and we shall not oppose it tonight.

8.46 pm

Ms Rosie Winterton: First, I apologise to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). I thought that he was standing in just for this evening, but as that is not the case, let me extend a very warm welcome to him in his return to the position that he previously occupied.

A certain amount of confusion has been expressed about the difference between the various officers and the changes that took place following the quinquennial review and the report of the Public Accounts Committee. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath referred to the Public Guardianship Office, which is completely separate from the Public Trustee. The Public Trustee and the Official Solicitor are the same person.

Mr. Burnett: Will the Minister make it clear that the Public Trustee still acts in trusts, although not in trusts for those who are mentally incapacitated?

Ms Winterton: Yes, following the review, much of the trust work that dealt with very vulnerable people in particular, for example those who had been involved in road traffic accidents and so forth, was transferred to the Public Trustee. The Public Guardianship Office continues to look after people who are suffering from mental incapacity.

In addition, there has been some confusion about fees. The fee-setting powers have been transferred from the Treasury to the Lord Chancellor. In modern practice, the Minister with responsibility for the policy holds those powers. However, the powers to set fees for trust work as set out in section 9(1) of the Public Trustee Act 1906 provide for the Treasury to set fees with the sanction of the Lord Chancellor. We are regularising the position.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) made some particular points about a constituent. I will be happy to explain some of the differences between the offices and where his constituent's problems may lie—he may be talking about a constituent who is having difficulties with the Public Guardianship Office, as opposed to the Public Trustee. I would be happy to deal with that if he would like to write to me or come to see me about those problems.

The amount of money under management is in the region of £250 million. I cannot give details of the exact number of cases at the moment, but I would be happy to write to the hon. Gentleman. I will also be happy to write to him about his detailed questions about the number of staff at the Official Solicitor's Office and the Public Trustees Office. He will know that I have written to explain that we did not think that it would be appropriate to separate the two posts at present. Indeed, that might well lead to increased, rather than decreased, costs. I will certainly write to him about the detailed matters that he discussed.

[Ms Winterton]

On beneficiaries making up money, we are trying to make it possible for a proper remissions policy to be introduced so that full cost recovery under the Act is not necessary—a public subsidy is allowed. Of course, the Public Trustee will work within the general Treasury rules. We wanted to ensure that these very vulnerable people would have the possibility of remissions in fees and, if necessary, therefore, there would be a public subsidy. I hope that that answers some of the questions.

Mr. Hawkins: I understand that the Minister is going to write to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) with various details on the number of staff and so forth. She answered my question about funding, but she has not given the undertaking that I requested that people will no longer suffer inordinate delays in getting a simple acknowledgement of correspondence and papers, as some of my constituents have done, from the Office of the Public Trustee. That is the sort of problem that was highlighted by the Public Accounts Committee in successive reports on the manifold sins and wickednesses of the Public Trustee. I want an assurance that correspondence will be answered promptly.

Ms Winterton: Of course, we will do everything within our power to ensure that that happens. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we do not want those vulnerable people, or those who care for them, to suffer any inordinate delays. I hope that the changes that we have put in place following the criticisms from the Public Accounts Committee and the quinquennial review will lead to that result.

I commend the Bill to be read a Third time.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Local Government Finance

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

8.52 pm

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): First, we very much regret the late start for this important debate; it could not be predicted when the time was originally allocated. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House stated earlier, we will explore options for a further debate to give the many hon. Members who want to speak on this important subject the opportunity to do so.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the light of the Minister's statement, those hon. Members who may be called to speak briefly this evening may want to participate in the continuation debate. Would that be in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Obviously, an hon. Member can speak only once in a debate, so the hon. Gentleman should make no such assumption.

Mr. Raynsford *rose—*

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I appreciate that it is not the Minister's fault and we are looking forward to hearing what he has to say, but his advice will no doubt be sought, so I hope that when it is he will say that, because of the number of hon. Members who want to speak and the importance of the subject, the debate should be held on the Floor of the House, not in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Raynsford: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern and I can give him the assurances that he requests because I have spoken to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House about the importance of having an early opportunity for a further debate. How that can be arranged will obviously depend on discussions between the usual channels. There are constraints, but it is important that we should have that debate and I was certainly very reassured by the view taken by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: Before I take any more interventions, may I point out to hon. Members that, given the short time available, I have deliberately chosen to limit my speech? We will make swifter progress and Back Benchers will have a greater opportunity to speak if Members limit their points of order or interruptions. I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Foster: I apologise for taking up some of the Minister's time, but I for one want to hear in some detail what he has to say.

Further to the question put by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), is the Minister prepared to say whether he believes that a further debate should be held on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House for some time, so he ought to

know that it is not the role of Ministers to determine the business of the House. I have already given a perfectly clear undertaking. I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that he is wasting the time of the House, which should rightly be focused on the issues.

Despite the extremely technical nature of many of the issues involved and the difficulty of making sense of all of them, the grant distribution system is one of the most important things done by the Government. Local government accounts for about 25 per cent. of all public expenditure—about £60 billion in total. More than £40 billion of that comes in the form of grant direct from the Government. Until now, the grant has mainly been distributed using standard spending assessments, which cover money for key services such as education, social services, waste management, sports, arts, libraries, police and many others. The spending review has confirmed further increases in substantial investment in those services. This debate is about how we channel that money through to councils.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am interested in my right hon. Friend's criteria for the success of that proposal. Will one of them be that he will reduce the disparity between authorities, thereby making the system fairer?

Mr. Raynsford: I shall explore in some detail some of the key principles behind the consultation but I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that there are many definitions of fairness and that it would be wrong for me to give a particular commitment when there are also many others to consider. After all, we are engaged in a consultation exercise and no decisions have yet been taken on the final formula.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Raynsford: Although I am happy to give way—hon. Members know that I am usually happy to do so—it will limit the amount of time available for Back Benchers if I have to take too many interventions.

Michael Fabricant: In that case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not try to catch your eye later on.

In a spirit of helpfulness, the Minister raised questions about fairness. Will he give an assurance that counties such as Staffordshire will be no worse off than they are at present—and, believe me, they are pretty badly off at present?

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, I shall cover that specific point later in my speech. I have given undertakings that will have been heard by many Members who attended the seminars held yesterday and a week ago.

It is important to emphasise one significant change that we are going to make from the old SSA principles. The original idea behind SSAs was to deliver a standard level of service for a standard level of council tax. If that ever worked in the past, which frankly I doubt, we certainly do not believe that it works at present. Furthermore, we are also clear that such an approach is fundamentally incompatible with our objective of giving greater freedom and discretion to local authorities. Rather than pretending that we can say how much every council should spend, we are, under our new framework, focusing on how we distribute grant to councils.

When we began to consider how to improve the system, we examined the range of options. Some authorities told us that formulae did not take their circumstances into account, so we offered local government the choice of using assessments of their own plans as the basis for distribution rather than formulae. We consulted on that in a Green Paper two years ago. In response, a large majority of councils said that they would prefer to keep the system based on formulae that look at their circumstances and their ability to raise council tax. If people ask why we are sticking with a system that is not fundamentally different from current arrangements, the answer is because that is what local government asked us to do.

If the underlying approach is not fundamentally different, the detailed formulae will change. That is because everyone—Government, Opposition, councils, schools, individuals—had lost faith in the old formulae. They had been in place for over a decade. Some of them were based on very old information. Some were perverse. Many did not adequately reflect the conditions and circumstances that we face today. So while we are not abandoning the use of formulae, we are taking a fresh look at the formulae; and it is those formulae that determine how the money is divided between councils.

In looking afresh at the formulae, we have fully engaged with local government. Technical work has been discussed in detail with representatives of local authorities, including, of course, the Local Government Association.

We have also had a number of discussions with councillors and MPs, and we have tried as far as possible to involve those who are concerned about the process in evolving options for change. We have also conducted all this work as openly as possible, sharing options, evidence and ideas as we have gone along. I and my ministerial colleagues—I am very grateful that many of them are present tonight—have also seen many delegations on the issue. We have held several seminars for Members of Parliament, the most recent one yesterday. I am delighted to say that some 90 Members attended, which shows the interest in this important subject.

Inevitably, many of the representations that we have received, and much of the evidence submitted to us, have been contradictory. That is understandable, since people come at this with different priorities and different ideas about what would constitute a fair system. We recognise that we shall not be able to agree with everyone, or address all the issues, or give everyone a bigger share of the cake. But we have tried to give everyone the opportunity to be heard and we are trying to ensure that the outcome does reflect, as far as possible, the many good proposals and suggestions that have been put to us.

Let me at this point make one thing crystal clear. Contrary to what some people have suggested—indeed, contrary to what some hon. Members may hope—we have not approached this review with any pre-determined outcome in mind. There is no agenda to shift

[Mr. Raynsford]

resources from one part of the country to another. Of course, in any major change such as the one that we are undertaking there will be distributional consequences.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: But the consequences are not predetermined; they will be decided by full, careful and thorough evaluation of all the evidence and of the logic and force of the arguments. That is perhaps an unfortunate moment to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Swayne: The Minister is most kind. What estimate have the Government made of the likely increase in total Government expenditure that will be consequent upon redistributing grant to local authorities, which will then spend their additional allocation, which will have to be replaced by additional council taxes from those who lose that grant? What will the total increase in public expenditure be?

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman had been following what I said earlier, he would know that I have made it clear that there is a substantial further increase implicit in the spending review, which will ensure a good increase for local government in the settlement. If he will bear with me, I will come to guarantees for all councils.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I thank the Minister for giving way on that point. I am very concerned. He talked about fairness and said that all the formulae have been looked at and there has been no predetermination. The south-west could lose out by £152 million under the formula. It currently has an SSA of £876 per head, compared with an average of £995. I cannot see how any fairness or justice under any formula could end up with the south-west losing out at all.

Mr. Raynsford: If the hon. Gentleman had borne with me for a moment, he would have avoided making a rather foolish allegation that there will be losses, when we have on so many occasions made it quite clear that no authority will suffer a loss. I shall come to that in a moment.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way to my hon. Friend and then I shall try to make some progress, because I know that many Back Benchers want to speak.

Mr. Watts: Will the Minister assure many of us that not only will the system not seek to shift money from one area to another but that it will not seek to maintain the present position? Many of us believe that the present position is unfair.

Mr. Raynsford: As my hon. Friend will have heard from what I have said, we are committed to significant changes in the formulae, which will have distributional consequences.

One of the original goals of the review was to try to simplify and streamline the mass of complications that surround the system. This has proved one of the most difficult of the big questions that we have had to resolve. Local government has consistently said that it favours transparency, but not at the expense of oversimplification. There are benefits in achieving greater simplicity, not least in terms of the people affected having a chance of understanding the system, but simplicity leads inexorably to rough justice and, if taken too far, undermines confidence that the system takes full account of the appropriate indicators.

Although no decisions have yet been taken, we recognise that the desire for a radically simpler system will need to be balanced against concerns that that would lead to unfairness. Having said that, we believe that it is possible to create a clearer and more consistent framework with the new formulae based around four principal components. There should be a basic allocation for each recipient of the service, such as the number of elderly people receiving care from social services or each mile of road requiring maintenance. On top of that, there should be three top-ups respectively for deprivation, pay costs and other costs, such as the additional costs of delivering services in sparsely populated areas.

We have discussed the issue with local government and others, and there has been general support for that framework. Of course that does not mean that there is agreement about the weighting given to each component. Indeed, some of the fiercest arguments have raged over those issues. One authority will say that deprivation should be made more important; another will say that pay costs are what matter most, while others will focus on the per head allocation or sparsity.

I have no doubt that those arguments will continue to rage during the weeks ahead. However, there has been another very important strand to the representations that local government has made to us: the calls for increased predictability and stability in the system. We have gone some way towards that in recent years with the introduction of floors and ceilings to limit year-on-year grant changes. That has been generally welcomed, although, of course, views tend to differ depending on whether an authority expects to be in the floor or the ceiling zone. As that can change from year to year, consistency is not always evident in the representations that we receive on this subject. However, we recognise that the review has inevitably created additional uncertainty, in particular with worries about authorities facing a cut in funding.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I ask my hon. Friend to bear with me a moment.

That is why I have given a clear guarantee—I repeat it now—that, regardless of the answers that the new formulae produce, no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like-for-like basis. For the avoidance of doubt, I should say that that does not include inflation, but it will cushion authorities against the immediate impact not just of the new formulae but of other changes, such as the new population figures from the

2001 census. Of course, when announcing the floors for next year, we certainly hope to do better than that simple no-cash-loss guarantee, but we cannot go further on the general grant at this point because we do not yet have the final data or know what distribution the formulae will give.

If we were to set a high floor now, we would risk having to reduce it later if it turned out to be unaffordable. Alternatively, we would risk having to set a ceiling only just above, or equal to, the level of the floor. The latter would make nonsense of the whole review; the former would have a dire impact on authorities' budget planning processes. So I hope that hon. Members will understand why we are giving a clear guarantee of no losses. We will go further, but we cannot yet announce the floor and ceilings.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The right hon. Gentleman has confirmed that the no-cut guarantee is only in cash terms, not in real terms. Can he give a similar guarantee—if that is what it will be—for the other two years in the plan period? Will the same guarantee apply next year and the year after?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman ought to remember that I answered that question when he asked it at yesterday's seminar, so rather than detain the House now—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry that he seems to have a bout of amnesia and cannot remember the answer.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is clearly the sort of debate in which we all benefit from many interventions and the Minister answering questions clearly and unhurriedly. The Leader of the House promised—while you were in the Chair, sir—that this debate will be continued another day, so would it not be sensible for the Minister to take as long as he wants and as many interventions as he wishes? Several of his colleagues are nodding as I speak. We could just hear the Minister's speech tonight and have a chance to intervene, as the debate will continue another day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter on which the occupant of the Chair can advise.

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Minister to withhold information from the House on the basis that he gave the information yesterday in a seminar, which was not part of the official proceedings of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair is not responsible for the answers that Ministers give from the Front Bench.

Mr. Raynsford: May I say in the nicest possible way to the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) that as he, too, was present at the seminar, he might have spared the time of the House by speaking personally to his hon. Friend?

Michael Fabricant: This is ridiculous. I, and other Members, may not have been present at the seminar for perfectly legitimate reasons. The House was not recalled until today. It is completely improper for a Minister to say that some people in the House might have heard an answer at an informal seminar, while other Members such as me could not be present, as the House was not in Session. The Minister is being asked a question on the Floor of the House. Will he now answer it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I assume that that is a point of order to the Chair. All that I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that I am sure that hon. Members—and not least the hon. Gentleman—have means of prising information from Ministers.

Mr. Raynsford: As I was saying, I was delighted at the very large numbers of Members who attended yesterday's seminar and at a similarly large number who attended the other seminar that we held the week before. I am very sorry that the hon. Gentleman was unable to attend either of those events. For his benefit and that of others who were not able to attend the seminar, the answer is that I made it clear that we will continue floors and ceilings in future years.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint).

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): My right hon. Friend said that the allowance per mile of local roads would be considered. May I bring to his attention the dilemma that faces many coalmining communities, which has been raised by the Coalfield Communities Campaign—namely, the number of unadopted roads in those communities and the problems of finding finance to work with residents to bring them back into council ownership? Will he consider including, at least for a few years, unadopted roads in target areas in the allowance per mile?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend presciently anticipates exactly what I was about to say. Local authorities rightly feel passionately about changes to the formulae that would better reflect their local needs and circumstances. Equally, Members on both sides of the House want their area to get a fair share of the cake. We will listen carefully to all that is said tonight and on any future occasion when such a debate may be held. Within the bounds of feasibility—as I suspect that some of the demands will be mutually contradictory—we will endeavour to reflect in our final decisions the concerns that have been voiced. We do not expect to please everyone.

Sir Paul Beresford: If I may take the Minister back a couple of paragraphs in his speech, he was talking about protection of local authorities and using floors. In the assessment of the floor, is he taking into account grant or grant plus discretionary grant?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman asks a technical question about the way in which floors are constructed. To explain the matter briefly, without going into too much detail, as I do not want to take too much time, the purpose of the floor is to ensure that no authority gets

[Mr. Raynsford]

less than a prescribed sum determined in a particular year. That refers to general grant distributed currently through the SSA system and grant that will be distributed through the formula grant distribution framework in future. It applies to general grant.

We do not expect to please everyone—we would be very foolish if we thought that we could do so. In fact, we will have done rather well if we do not disappoint everyone. What we are determined to do, however, is to replace the old, discredited SSA system with a new grant distribution formula that is fairer, that better reflects today's needs and circumstances, that is less complex, less confusing and less perverse, and that enables local authorities to plan with greater certainty and to deliver the high-quality services that people rightly expect from their local council.

9.14 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I regret what has happened. Despite any reservations that we may have about the formulae, it is clear that the right hon. Gentleman has put in an enormous amount of effort and work. The two seminars were very good and well attended, and he went out of his way to answer the points made, so it is a shame that such effort has been rewarded by this debate. The subject deserves a full day's debate. I am pleased to understand that we will have a further debate on the matter—a continuation of this debate—on the Floor of the House. I am sure that all the Members who have constituency cases to make will not be disappointed to learn that.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my hon. Friend agree that if there is to be a continuation of this debate, as the Leader of the House has promised, it must take place on the Floor of the House? We cannot continue somewhere else a debate that was started here.

Mr. Pickles: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The working of the usual channels are a complete mystery to me, but a bearer of tidings passed down a whisper that the debate might well take place on the Floor of the House. If that is so, we can be a little easier on the Government. However, we look forward to continuing with the debate.

While I am in a mood to hand bouquets to the Minister, let me present him with another sweet-smelling rose. I congratulate the Government on achieving what many thought was impossible. They have taken a complex formula, added their special magic and made it even more complex. The once impenetrable labyrinth of local government grant is now firmly shrouded in mist.

More seriously, the Government have taken a system that relied heavily on formulae and that ensured minimum interference from the Government and added a strong element of discretion. The County Councils Network referred to such discretion in its advice to all Members of the House. It said:

"These top-ups are more susceptible to manipulation, the basic entitlement is therefore a far more equitable means of funding local authority services."

That is right. One of the most remarkable features of local government finance and involvement from the centre is how little manipulation took place in the past. [*Laughter.*] I am sorry to be greeted by such laughter of disbelief, because I do not believe—

Mr. Watts *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not giving way and he should be heard with the same quiet as the Minister for Local Government and the Regions.

Mr. Pickles: In fairness, I may have slightly provoked the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts).

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pickles: Of course. I shall then give way to the hon. Member for St. Helens, North.

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend speaks about manipulation, but is he aware that, under the Government's proposals, my county of East Sussex could lose up to £44 million, which equates to 900 teachers or care for more than 2,000 vulnerable elderly people?

Mr. Pickles: I am aware of that. I had the opportunity to visit my hon. Friend's county council a couple of weeks ago and was most struck by the need that exists there. I was also struck by the time—87 hours a week—that its excellent chief executive had spent on dealing with Government forms and the like. My hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

Mr. Watts: If the hon. Gentleman believes that the previous Government did not manipulate the present system, will he explain why, when the changes took place, they transferred millions of pounds from Labour authorities to Tory authorities? My authority lost £10 million overnight.

Mr. Pickles: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question, but I have as good a memory as his. I recall the time that Bradford was Labour controlled and was on a similar band to Wandsworth. When Wandsworth did very well, Bradford did very well. In fact, we went and became Conservative controlled.

The Minister is right to say that there is a strong element of rough justice in the system, but instead of providing greater equality, the Government have instead increased the rough justice. A change of such magnitude should be based on consensus. The Minister referred to the seminars organised by his Department. I attended only one of them, but I suspect that the others were as good tempered. Members from both sides of the House offered sound advice and there is a willingness to find a fair formula. However, it is impossible to build a consensus on the basis of transferring and losing £304 million to the metropolitan authorities, as estimated by the County Councils Network. The figure could even be as high as £800 million, based on some calculations.

The way in which the calculation has been put together and the various options available make it difficult, even for someone who is as keen as mustard on local government finance, to work out a precise picture for each authority.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about disparity and losing money, does he think it right that his authority gets £200 more per primary school pupil than my county council, which is not a metropolitan area? Is that fair? Is there anything to justify why his area's needs are greater than mine, which is a far more deprived area?

Mr. Pickles: There are many different reasons for that, which is why the formula has been so difficult to agree. For example, there are levels of deprivation and staffing costs to consider. The hon. Lady misunderstands and she is not helping the debate if she thinks that I am defending the existing scheme. One reason why the Government have spent such a long time producing an alternative is that it is a difficult thing to do. I was hoping that we might arrive at a consensus and believe that that is still possible. Local government deserves a system that is transparent and understandable. It deserves a system that we can all support.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood) *rose—*

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) first.

Paddy Tipping: The hon. Gentleman talks about the need for consensus and fairness. Will he set down the principles that he and his party would use to distribute grant?

Mr. Pickles: I am happy to do so. However, as the old saying goes, I do not think that I would have started from here. We need a thorough review of the functions of local government and to get agreement on the criteria that determine how grant is distributed. On that basis, I would certainly be willing to build a consensus.

David Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: In a moment.

However, it is impossible to build a consensus when individual high-performing authorities are penalised with the removal of grants worth tens of millions of pounds. It is impossible to build a consensus while low-performing authorities are rewarded with a cash windfall. It is impossible to build a consensus when, as *The Times* asserted in a July headline, "Labour will tax Tory voters to fund heartland".

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Does my hon. Friend see anything fair in the fact that East Sussex, which is the poorest shire county in England, is also the worst affected? [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Pickles: I am sorry to hear Labour Members laugh. My hon. Friend speaks the truth, certainly in terms of average income and of the size of the cuts in relation to the budget.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: If hon. Members bear with me, I want to make some progress and then I will happily give way—

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye) *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: I mean exactly what I say: I will give way in a moment.

Decisions will be made known in December. That will be about the same time as the Audit Commission gives its verdict on larger councils, through the comprehensive performance assessment. Is the Minister prepared to give a guarantee that the top 10 local authorities will not have grant taken away from them and that the incompetence of the bottom 10 will not be rewarded with extra grant?

Mr. Raynsford: I am happy to respond to that. Before I do so, I take the opportunity to say that I have been informed that, following discussions held by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, we now feel hopeful that it will be possible to extend this debate on the Floor of the House next week. In response to the hon. Gentleman's question, I have already given a guarantee that no authority will receive less grant, so there is no question of any high-performing authority suffering a loss. That gives the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. Pickles: I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that on 12 December that will not spare his blushes.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: I shall give way in a moment.

The Government have ignored this issue for six years. It is clear from the consultation that they have not used that period to gather information. After six years, we are nowhere near agreement on the heads of need. We have moved from a position in which the Government were acting like a sleeping dormouse to a new phase in which they are like a bat out of hell. Their determination to push through these reforms by May will do untold harm to fragile local government. As a result, in the words of the Rural Services Partnership,

"the work that has been carried out has been compressed into a short timescale and some of it appears to be lacking in rigour".

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Having heard the Minister's reassurance, will the hon. Gentleman

[Jim Knight]

reassure us that if his party were in office it would match the Government's plans to increase local government spending by 5 per cent. next year?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman may have misheard his right hon. Friend. He gave an undertaking that in cash terms there will be no difference in grant, but as people will readily understand, that will in no way compensate local authorities for their cost base and wage bill.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: Of course I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is so patient.

Mr. Foster: Several Conservative Members have mentioned East Sussex. Is it not the case that East Sussex took a reduction of 7 per cent. in real terms in the last three years of the previous Conservative Government? Would the hon. Gentleman be prepared to match the amount that this Government are at least guaranteeing?

Mr. Pickles: I hope that *Hansard* is available in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, because those words require wide circulation. [HON. MEMBERS: "What does that mean?"] It means that the hon. Gentleman will have a bit of a problem.

The Minister's guarantee that no authority will receive less cash next year is not sufficient to meet councils' existing needs. We know from rising pay settlements and a growing cost base that those moneys will not meet next year's costs and will lead to council tax increases and service cuts. Even the real-terms guarantee on education is so full of escape clauses that its effectiveness should be doubted. The Association of Secondary Heads in Essex told the Department on 13 September:

"Our experiences of 'real term guarantees' in recent years have meant that our budgets have lost out. This happened in the 2002–2003 budget round when the Learning Skills Council became involved in budget calculations for the first time. In 2002–2003 many Essex secondary schools suffered a 'real terms' cut in their budgets, despite the fact that they had been promised growth."

Given that Essex could lose about £80 million, Kent rising £90 million and East Sussex £43 million, no cash guarantee will be effective. The removal of sums of those proportions cannot be achieved by painless cuts or salami-slicing in line with the Government's gradual withdrawal of grant by placing a floor on the loss. Whole sections of public services will be abandoned or rationed. Even if the Government announce a floor of 3, 4, 5 or even 6 per cent., local authorities will have to make decisions about the wholesale abandonment of important public services.

Sir Paul Beresford: Does my hon. Friend take into account the fact that some local authorities rely to a large extent on discretionary grants? If they are at the floor, such authorities will lose out dramatically, because the discretionary grant element will not be taken into account.

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend has extensive experience of these matters and he is absolutely right. Furthermore, local authorities want to return to the levels of specific grants seen in the Tory years, because far less discretion is available to them now than they had under the Conservatives. The Minister looks surprised, but that is what the county councils said in a letter to him; I advise him to pay more attention to his mail.

David Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is moving on from the distribution of rate support grant to specific grants. Perhaps he will take a further step and consider how the national non-domestic rate is currently distributed. The system is extremely simple: every authority receives the same sum per person. Does he endorse the Government's proposals to merge NNDR into RSG, creating a formula-based system, which will not contribute to the transparency and intelligibility that are probably major planks in the consensus that he seeks?

Mr. Pickles: I do indeed seek consensus, and I believe that consensus is possible on this issue, because I got the distinct impression from the Minister that the Government were having a rethink. I see the Minister smile, so perhaps it will be possible to build consensus. There is no sense in merging NNDR and RSG: there are several disadvantages to doing so, particularly for local authorities that currently receive no RSG. In addition, there is the importance of co-operation between business and local authorities and the need for transparency, and the current system is better in those respects than the Government's proposed changes.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Neither the Government nor the official Opposition have mentioned what I regard as the nub of the problem: the area cost adjustment. Many of us feel that there was a fiddle. It is understandable in the light of the notion that teachers, social workers and others in the south-east face additional costs, but it creates a blatant unfairness that must, if possible, be removed. I am interested in hearing whether the official Opposition will seek to remove the area cost adjustment.

Mr. Pickles: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman—I do not think that the area cost adjustment was a fiddle. There is a case for examining it, but some of the proposals regarding the number of people who fall off the different steps would merely replace one perversity with another. The Government appear to have got hold of the idea of zones within counties for the purposes of the area cost adjustment, but the Minister will be aware of the huge variations that occur, for example, in the counties around London and the different parts of those counties.

Let me return briefly to the real-terms guarantee. Taking out sums of such proportions will result in public services having to be reduced. The Minister's refusal to provide even a working assumption as to the level of the floor of the withdrawal is harming local authorities' plans. Despite pleas from Sir Jeremy Beecham, the chairman of the Local Government Association, the Minister has refused to go beyond a zero per cent. floor, suggesting in a letter that 3 per cent. might be too high. However, at this time of year, councils are at an advanced stage of their budgetary cycle, and Government's silence makes them fear the worst. Council budgets are not going to be put together in the

spring—we have moved far beyond that. Most of them are put together in the autumn. The refusal to offer anything other than a zero floor is to the detriment of local government.

Mr. Portillo: I noted that the Minister was extremely careful in his use of language this evening. Not only is there a zero guarantee for the first year, but in subsequent years floors and ceilings, he said, would continue. He did not say which floor would continue—he did not say that it would be the same floor—and did not specify the years. Does my hon. Friend agree that his reluctance to repeat what he said yesterday in a private meeting in the Chamber, where it can go on public record, may reflect the fact that floors and ceilings in future years will not be the floors and ceilings of the first year?

Mr. Pickles: My right hon. Friend is correct—the Minister is not in a position to say that there will be no pain or to say, "Don't worry, the amount of money will be reduced." Even on a cash basis, there will be a substantial cut for local authorities of 5 or 6 per cent. We must remember that the total sums being discussed are tens of millions of pounds.

Resource equalisation, whereby a council's tax-raising potential is taken into account, was introduced relatively late and offers a perverse incentive to embrace higher levels of expenditure. It also penalises lower-income families in areas with high house prices. Labour Members laughed and scoffed at the mention of East Sussex, which has high local house prices but low incomes. It has almost the lowest average income in England, comparable to that of Tyne and Wear. The system, however, which is supposedly designed to deal with deprivation and sparsity, takes £43 million from the county.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) asked my hon. Friend what the Conservative party would do in government about local government finance. Will he fill out his reply and say whether he has followed the excellent work conducted for more than two years by the F40 group of local authorities, led in the House with great distinction by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), who has highlighted many inadequacies and made sound proposals on the way in which injustices in the present system could be put right? I speak for Cheshire, a county that features extremely badly in the formula, and has done so under successive Governments.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) is blushing, and so am I at my hon. Friend's question. I believe that I elaborated my thoughts in considerable detail and shall happily go to greater lengths, but I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me to do so in private.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Will the hon. Gentleman clear up something that was not obvious in his speech? Fourteen per cent. of the pot of money that goes into local government is taken out and given to local authorities, which bid for it in special grants. Is the hon. Gentleman's policy to restore that 14 per cent. or is it to get back to the 4 per cent. that applied when the Conservatives were last in power?

Mr. Pickles: It was not 4 per cent., but nearer 6 per cent. It depends on how one counts.

Mr. Don Foster: It was just over 4 per cent.

Mr. Pickles: I shall not haggle over a couple of percentage figures, but I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman is right. On the general point, however, the level of discretion is about 17 per cent. Given that most local authorities spend three quarters of their budget on staffing, that leaves them little discretion on how the rest is spent. Both I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) are firmly committed to increasing the amount of local authorities' discretion so that they do not have to go cap in hand to the Government. If the Liberal Democrats want to join us in defending local government, they will be more than welcome to do so.

As we have discovered, we can talk for hours about the area cost adjustment, the relevant merits of different recruitment costs, zone integrity and various different steps. We can talk about the desirability of lowering the top-up for additional educational needs, but at a time when rural communities are desperate for reassurance that their concerns have been heard in this Chamber, the Government have kicked away the ladder. This is a mess masquerading as a solution; a blind rush without purpose or principle. The proposals do not have the confidence of local government and should not have the confidence of the House.

9.40 pm

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I am amused by the comments of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). In response to an intervention he referred to defending local government. I remember clearly that when he was leader of Bradford council for a short period he sold off old people's homes with old people in them. Therefore, defending local government was far from his mind then.

Mr. Pickles: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has given way because it gives me a chance to say this: under my leadership of Bradford council, we sold not one single old persons' home. The party that sold an old persons' home—to a Labour councillor—formed the incoming Labour Administration. Hypocrites!

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman set in motion the sale of the homes and was then removed from the leadership of Bradford council because people in the community said that that was not what they wanted. In fact, they are saying to the Tories now that they do not want their policies. The hon. Gentleman's speech showed clearly that the Tories have no proposals for the future of local government.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. The Opposition did

[Mr. Colin Challen]

not have a word to say about cities or urban areas; they are trying to divide the country. They do not want a fair system; it is all about East Sussex.

Mr. O'Brien: I am sure that my hon. Friend has identified the real point.

Local government finance and the distribution formula will be of paramount importance to local authorities if we are to provide the world class services that we talk about. As chairman in the House of Commons of the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities outside London—SIGOMA—I join my colleagues who represent those 48 major authorities in pleading with the Minister to ensure that we get a fair, transparent, simpler and more stable system of resource distribution for local government. People expect a great deal from government. They want well-run schools for their children, crime-free streets and good quality care for older people and the vulnerable in our communities. Little or no change to the system of local government funding will not provide those services and the better environment that we all expect. SIGOMA's case is for a more robust system of resource distribution. That is well known to the Ministers and all Departments.

To make our case, I must compare the authorities in SIGOMA and those that will be affected by the resource distribution with London authorities, as there are some similarities between the two groups. Our communities suffer from generally higher deprivation than that suffered in London's urban areas. A major consequence of that is lower attainment, particularly in education. Despite the deprivation and lower attainment, our communities pay on average £125 more in band D properties than people in band D properties in London communities.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I am sorry, but I have only a few moments.

Even after the assumed higher cost of providing services in London is taken into account, our communities still receive on average £140 per head less than the London boroughs. My own authority, Wakefield, has one of the lowest education SSAs in the country. To bring this element of Wakefield's SSA up to the metropolitan average would entail an increase in SSA or its replacement by £11 million. The children in the Normanton constituency are entitled to the same standard and quality of education as children elsewhere in the country. Not to change the financial formula for local government services is to deny my constituents fairness and justice.

In April this year, the Secretary of State for Health announced his intention to create a radically different relationship between health and social services, particularly in the provision of care for older people. Local government shares central Government's aim to improve care for the elderly, but the NHS plan will fail if social care is not properly funded. The way to address the problems of social care is not by penalising local councils. That has happened in areas where the Audit Commission has been compiling reports. My area suffered because of such a report. Penalising local authorities will not solve the problem of caring for the elderly and the vulnerable.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will my hon. Friend give way briefly?

Mr. O'Brien: I am sorry—I have only three minutes left.

Councils' total contribution to supporting social care amounts to more than £1 billion over and above the SSAs on which the Government base the grant that they give to local authorities. That is a further reason for the current system to be reviewed.

The area cost adjustment is always mentioned in debates such as this. It was raised at the seminar, and I am sure that it will be raised repeatedly until some fairness is introduced into it. Members of SIGOMA are not against any adjustment in the distribution system to recognise some of the problems that London boroughs may have. What we ask is that any adjustment should be made on the basis of actual, rather than assumed, needs. I appeal to my right hon. Friend to give that serious consideration.

This morning, in a meeting of the Select Committee taking evidence on social housing, we were told that local authorities in London have different problems, and that what applies in one borough does not necessarily apply in others. The area cost adjustment must therefore be based on actual costs, not on assumed costs, as that is demonstrably unfair.

Finally, I refer to the EPCS—environmental, protective and cultural services—block, which is a further concern to local authorities. Provision of services under this block is almost always the lowest funded and most under-resourced. A review of the services covered by the EPCS block is essential. The EPCS block is usually a passport to other services, and it is those other services that lose out.

On the consequences of the decline in population, a fall in population might be seen as a blessing. We in SIGOMA refute that. Those who are most able to move from an area are those most likely to have transferable skills and a better education and to be more economically active. Those left in the area are less able to pay higher council taxes, yet are more in need of quality public services to guarantee a decent standard of living. On the EPCS block, such increases and the transfer of resources mean that there will be underinvestment and a lack of support for the delivery of world class services if we do not recognise the importance of services in that block, including playing areas, roads, open spaces and street lighting. The services take the brunt of the cuts, so I ask my right hon. Friend to give us a formula that will be transparent and robust, and which we can understand and explain to the people whom we represent.

9.50 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): In these rather bizarre circumstances, and in what may, I hope, be seen as part one of my contribution, I intend to say a little bit about why I am concerned about what is currently happening

and mention what I think should happen next. In what I hope will be part two of my speech, at an unspecified later date, I shall speak in more detail on my thoughts about the way forward.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) rightly tried to see whether it was possible to build some consensus in the House. I suspect that there is consensus in all parts of the House at least about the view that local government needs a different and fairer funding system. I hope that I can also build consensus in respect of the bouquets that he gave to the Minister. Indeed, I suspect that nobody in the House would deny the Minister's clear commitment to local government. I give him credit for his willingness to take on a challenge that almost everybody else has failed to tackle—in fairness, even the Local Government Association has failed to tackle it—and make some proposals about an alternative to the current discredited system.

The fact that I shall be critical of some of the Minister's proposals does not mean that I am critical of his energy in that direction. His commitment to local government has been demonstrated by the fact that it has felt the effects of a number of improvements in the past five years. We have seen a number of significant changes. For instance, capping is now more or less out of the window. Of course, there have also been some improvements in overall funding, but sadly, those increases have often been linked to increases in ring-fenced funding.

Mr. McWalter: Does the hon. Gentleman also agree that there should be consensus throughout the House about the fact that social services receive woefully inadequate funding throughout the country, whether in area cost adjustment areas or elsewhere? It is a vital function of this debate that that historic misery be corrected.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. The Minister might even leap to his feet to suggest that, in recognising that deficiency, the Government have put additional money into that block in the SSA formula. Were he to do so, however, he would also have to go a little further and acknowledge that, even with the additional moneys that have been put in, local authorities throughout the country are still reporting that their expenditure is well in excess of the amount that has been given and that many needs are not being met. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point.

Unfortunately, we have waited in vain for five long years for a new formula to replace the current discredited one. After two wasted years spent on the abortive attempt to introduce the plan-led approach, I believe that we are now in danger of rushing the current review through to full completion for the coming financial year in a way that could lead to the same disaster that resulted from rushing through changes to the A-level system. Hasty action now could create problems in future. The Government have left themselves a short time of only a few weeks to consider the many and varied responses to the consultation before they make their final settlement announcement.

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that, last year, the Government could not get their sums right for even the minimal changes—not the huge swathes that are now proposed—to the system as district councils with incorrectly calculated floors found to their cost. As the Minister said, a change in one part of the system led to unpredicted consequences elsewhere. The Government missed those consequences. How can we have genuine confidence that last year's mistakes will not be repeated and multiplied many times in the numerous changes that are proposed to floors and ceilings, let alone all the other changes, in the approaching financial year?

Richard Younger-Ross: My hon. Friend referred to floors and ceilings. Will he comment on the Minister's response to my earlier intervention about the long-term impact of formulae on potential? It is fair to say that if the floors exist and there is no impact in the first year, there may be no impact in the second or third year. However, what happens when the floors no longer exist? Will local authorities be worse off?

Mr. Foster: I fear that my hon. Friend's analysis is not correct because it is not necessarily the case that there will be no impact. As the Minister rightly pointed out, the floor refers only to a cash figure, not an inflation-related figure. I am sorry that I was unable to attend his seminars, which, I understand, were extremely good. However, in the seminars and in the Chamber tonight, he failed to state clearly what would happen after the first year. We understand that floors will continue to exist for several years, but the Minister has told us neither the number nor whether they will continue at the same level. For my hon. Friend's council and many others that fear losing out under any new arrangements, there is no certainty for the future.

I hope that my hon. Friend accepts that if the current formula is unfair and changes are required, the distribution mechanism needs to change. As the Minister said, there will always be those who will not get much more compared with others who will.

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): I was worried that, in supporting his colleague's comments, the hon. Gentleman was suggesting that there should be transitional arrangements that last for ever.

Mr. Foster: I believe that I was able to point out before the hon. Gentleman intervened that I did not advocate such a proposal. I acknowledge that if we want to change a system, there will be changes for many councils.

Sir Paul Beresford: The point that was made in the earlier intervention puts the Minister in an interesting position, because if his formula is so fair, the floors and ceilings will have to disappear.

Mr. Foster: I accept that that is likely. If the Minister was prepared to respond to our question about the length of time that floors will continue and their operation, we might get a clearer view.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman knows the answer better than the rest of the House.

Sir Patrick Cormack: This hon. Gentleman finds the subject so incomprehensible that it would be difficult for

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

him to explain it to his constituents. That is a genuine problem. Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) made the most important, simple point: whatever the result, it must be comprehensible, unlike the Schleswig-Holstein question? The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) will know that only three people knew it: one was dead, the other was mad and the third had forgotten it.

Mr. Foster: I have come across no hon. Member, including the Minister, who is capable of fully explaining current local government finance settlement arrangements. The new system that purports to be fairer will involve a complex mechanism. We must all get used to the fact that whatever we do will be relatively complex. That complexity and the need to review the matter in greater detail suggests that although some changes could be introduced in the next financial year, it would be better if the Government postponed them for a year. I shall explain the reasons for that in more detail in part two of my speech next week.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that earlier today on the Floor of the House—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITION

ASW Sheerness

10 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): The petition of current and former employees of ASW Sheerness—previously known as Co-steel Sheerness—and their partners

Declares that ASW Sheerness Steel is in the process of being wound up, causing a major shortfall in the pensions that will be received, thereby resulting in considerable hardship to its members. It is believed that this situation has arisen because of pensions legislation put in place by successive Governments.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urgently pass legislation both to ensure the restoration of the ASW Sheerness pension fund and to ensure that pensions legislation is more equitable in its treatment of members of company pension schemes.

And the petitioners remain, etc. Peter Holsten, 19 Princess Avenue, Minster, Sheerness.

To lie upon the Table.

Autistic Children

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Interest in the House in autism has been reflected since 1 May 1997 in 154 written parliamentary questions, eight oral parliamentary questions, nine early-day motions and, on my reckoning, at least three Adjournment debates. Those important Adjournment debates on the subject of autism have respectively been initiated by the distinguished chairman of the all-party group on autism, the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on the specific subject of Asperger's syndrome, and, finally, by the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham), whose debate took place, fittingly, on 9 January this year, very close to the start of autism awareness year.

Right hon. and hon. Members who take an interest in this subject will doubtless also be conscious that next month will see a further initiative from Autism in Mind, another important campaigning organisation in this field, which will stage a lobby of Parliament. I am, therefore, especially gratified—on this, our first day back after our lengthy parliamentary recess—to have the chance to raise with hon. Members this important issue. I do so conscious of the assistance of the National Autistic Society in general, and of its policy and campaigns manager, Steve Broach, and its parliamentary officer, Senay Camgoz, in particular. They have briefed me. I am not an expert, but I am doing my best to highlight issues of great importance to many of my constituents and to many constituents of Members on both sides of the Chamber.

I begin with a brief consideration of the definition and prevalence of the condition of autism. It is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects the way in which a person communicates with and relates to the people around him or her. It is important to understand that there are many different variants on the theme of autism. We are, after all, dealing with individuals. Some conditions involve learning disabilities, others do not. So there is a great variety. It is, therefore, fitting that the professional experts in the field have come up with the term "autistic spectrum disorder" to embrace the various different forms of the condition which people experience.

It is estimated that about 520,000 people in this country are autistic. To put it another way, 60 per 10,000 children under the age of eight are involved. That is a substantial number of people. Whatever the differences in their condition and needs, one thing that they have in common is, as one distinguished commentator on this subject has observed, that they suffer from a triad of impairments: an impairment of social interaction; an impairment of social communication; and an impairment of imagination.

Inevitably, we are all influenced in our thinking and pronouncements on this subject by constituency cases—local examples that have inspired us to think further about a subject about which we perhaps knew little. I have been approached by the mothers of Luke Bennion

and Ethan King in the Vale of Aylesbury, and they have told me of the harrowing ordeals that they and their children have undergone in pursuit of equity and service. Equally inevitably, as the House will understand, the case with which I am most familiar and about which I am most immediately concerned is that of my constituents, Pamela Keszei and her son, Christian.

Their story is instructive and I am sure that it will have many parallels in the constituencies of other hon. Members. When Christian was three and a half years old, a health visitor suspected that he might be autistic. The suspicion was not confirmed and no diagnosis was given. The family moved from Ruislip in Middlesex to Stone in my Buckingham constituency. It was fully five years later, when Christian was eight and a half years old, that he was diagnosed as autistic. That was after no fewer than three requests for a statement of his special educational needs. He went to a mainstream primary school in Stone. He had one hour a week of speech therapy and, I am horrified to reveal, only one hour per half term of specialist teaching.

Christian has now moved on, temporarily, to a mainstream secondary school, Mandeville upper school. At that institution, he has one hour a week of speech or language therapy and one hour a fortnight of specialist teaching. His overall package of assistance amounts to only half a day's education each day of the week. He is at the school for three hours a day with the support of a dedicated, but non-specialist, teacher and one helper.

In trying to form a picture of what Christian has suffered, it is important to retrace a step. When he was at primary school, he suffered bullying so regular and severe as to cause him to try to commit suicide on no fewer than three occasions. I have conversed and corresponded with Pamela Keszei. She is a remarkable and courageous lady. Her family has undergone the most appalling ordeal. Under the strain, she and her husband are now divorced. She faces childminding costs of £100 a week on average and will shortly have to resign her job as a manager for Age Concern in Aylesbury. She will almost certainly be condemned to live, against her will, on benefits. She may ultimately lose her home. She has focused, almost to the exclusion of everything else in her life and as she has had to do, on the needs and interests of her child.

I salute the indomitable will of that lady and those who support her, but I am horrified that she and her son have been failed by the system at every turn. People who know about the subject will readily testify that autistic children find it especially difficult to deal with change. However, Christian has been obliged to face change in the form of an interrupted education. He will have the chance in May to go to a special school in Princes Risborough that focuses more on education than life skills, although his mother and others would prefer a service that focused more on life skills than education. Remember how much ground has to be made up. That is the experience that that young lad has suffered, but it should not have been necessary.

We ought to take account of the testimony of Dr. Ann Rowland, Christian's clinical psychologist. Underlining the point about change, she says that Christian is a boy who finds change

"extremely difficult and anxiety provoking".

His mother continues to wage a relentless battle for due entitlement in the form of a tailored package of personal care for her child.

I want to put a series of legitimate challenges to the Minister in a non-partisan spirit. I shall raise three issues. The first concerns diagnosis, and the reality is that we face a postcode lottery. In 1999, the National Autistic Society discovered that 40 per cent. of parents had waited at least three years for a diagnosis, and that 65 per cent. of them had to see at least three professionals before a diagnosis was given. I know of cases in which as many as 10 professionals have offered a miscellany of different and sometimes hostile opinions to each other. Other hon. Members may be familiar with similar cases.

All too often, it has appeared that the determining factor in what has been on offer has been the availability of services rather than the needs of the child. That has to change. The system has to be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of the individual child because, manifestly, in cases of this kind the child cannot be expected to be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of the system.

We now have the national initiative on autism: screening and assessment. It is designed to provide an assessment of the current situation, to develop a template of good practice, to encourage multi-disciplinary assessment teams, and to propose a framework for training that would facilitate the earliest possible introduction of the new guidelines.

My first challenge to the Minister concerns the NIASA guidelines, which are due to be published in early 2003. Will the Government pledge to support those guidelines and to enable their national roll-out, thereby tackling the postcode lottery and ensuring consistency of diagnostic practice across the country?

The second problem is the gap between diagnosis and access to services. The Minister and other hon. Members will know that Early Bird and Help! are two National Autistic Society schemes that inform parents and others of their entitlements. Will the Government support the development of information and advice systems that effectively empower parents? A related and no less important point has to do with the gap that exists for many children between the expertises of professional agencies. Children do not always fall neatly into categories. Will the Government undertake to issue guidance to social services departments across the country to enable each autistic child to undergo an assessment under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, and to ensure that local authorities create pathways for effective support for families with children who experience autism?

The third real challenge relates to education and training. I referred earlier to the possibility that 60 children in 10,000 were involved, but the most recent research from the National Autistic Society suggests that as many as one child in 86 in schools is affected by autism. Whatever the numbers involved, it is essential that the school environment be responsive to the needs of those children, but 72 per cent. of schools have told the National Autistic Society that their teachers are unsatisfactorily trained in that respect.

My request to the Minister is that she tell the House whether the Government will instruct local education authorities to train teachers, assistants and all specialist

[Mr. John Bercow]

professionals in awareness and understanding of autism, as part of their responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.

In making this request—and I have made all these requests, as the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) and others will be aware, on behalf and with the support of the National Autistic Society—I simply remind the Minister of the campaigning involvement of the Parents Autism Campaign for Education, yet another key body in the field. It highlights in its literature the work of the Mental Health Foundation whose research suggests that even moderate increases in educational provision could result in major savings in later living costs.

This issue is not the subject of cross-party wrangling; it is, thankfully, the subject of cross-party co-operation, and I welcome that. I acknowledge that the Government are concerned about the issue and are taking a number of steps to improve provision which, despite all I have said—legitimately and with sincerity on behalf of my constituents—is much better than at one time it was. The numbers of people that we know to be experiencing autism are not necessarily that much greater, but reflect improved diagnosis. However, much still remains to be done.

I am sure that the Minister will make a constructive, helpful and informative speech. I wish to hear that speech, so I shall therefore sit down.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on raising this extremely important issue on the first day back after the summer recess. That is an indication of how important the matter is to increasing numbers of families throughout the country who have to cope with the severe problems experienced by children with a whole range of autism spectrum disorders.

As the hon. Gentleman said, autism is a complex and distressing condition for those directly affected by it and for their families and carers. The pressures can be immense. Children with autism often lead isolated lives; their social and communication difficulties place great stress on their families. I acknowledge the tremendous contribution made by families and carers in these difficult situations. It is clearly the responsibility of Government, nationally and locally, to put in place good, effective support services. Without their carers and families, the lives of these children would be much worse.

The hon. Gentleman acknowledged that there have been difficulties in this area for many years. The number of children who have been diagnosed with autism has increased recently, but it is primarily a result of better diagnosis and assessment that we are beginning to see the extent and scale of the problem. In years gone by, autistic children were almost the forgotten children with the hidden problem. We are beginning to uncover how great the problem is for communities.

The hon. Gentleman is right that the Government have taken a number of positive and practical steps. I accept that although much has been done in this area, there is a great deal more to do by all Government agencies—social services, education, local authorities and the voluntary sector. They need to pull together and put in place a package of support on which families, carers and children can rely.

The main issues that parents have raised concern early diagnosis, early intervention and early support. The evidence is that the earlier these matters are addressed, the better the long-term outcome is for the children and their families. Parents want quick and easy access to statutory and voluntary services. No one party has a monopoly on the provision of these services. It is important to ensure that a variety of diverse providers can meet the needs of these children. Parents also want straightforward, readily available information. They sometimes find themselves in a maze of different assessment, processes and organisations and do not know where to turn.

The overarching issue is about multi-agency planning and assessments. We talk, perhaps a little glibly, about joined-up thinking and services, but I can think of no better example of an area in which lack of integration means poor services for the families concerned.

I will deal with the three specific issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, but I should like to set out the way in which the Government are trying to introduce quality and rigour into the area. It is necessary to have a decent legislative framework, which has not been in place in the past. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 strengthens the support given to parents of children with special educational needs. In the past, finding a way through the legal process has often been a minefield for parents. I speak as a former local authority education lawyer, so I know the difficulties that parents have struggled with there.

We also introduced the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000, which gives people greater flexibility. The introduction of direct payments starts to give people more choice about the sort of services that they want provided. The inspection and regulatory standards of the Care Standards Act 2000 are very rigorous, enabling us to get some quality into the system. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 supports all children with disabilities, including those with autism and deals with some very vulnerable children indeed.

We have a legislative framework, but that will work only if it is underpinned by practical action for families on the ground in local communities. Therefore, we have the quality protects programme, which is a major programme to help children in general, but is also targeted on children with disabilities. I am pleased to be able to say that the grant directed at children with disabilities was £15 million last year, it is £15 million this year, and next year it will double to £30 million, so it is a significant investment for such children.

This is about trying to get greater integration of family support services—trying to integrate children with disabilities, including autism, into mainstream leisure and cultural activities. The hon. Gentleman mentioned children having life skills as well as education and having a chance to participate in the things that other children take for granted, which is extremely important. This is also about trying to ensure that people have key workers—one person to whom they can go, who can give them a gateway into the whole range of services that are available.

I have some practical examples of things that are happening under the quality protects programme, which are very encouraging. I will highlight a couple. In Cornwall, £1 million has been set aside to develop autism and Asperger's children's services. There is a five-bedded bungalow to provide respite care and transitional support and to ensure that parents can get a break from a tremendously stressful situation.

In Windsor and Maidenhead, a one-stop shop has been set up for children with disabilities, with a particular focus on children with autism. Again, it is trying to bring the agencies together so that parents are not pushed from pillar to post, trying to seek the most appropriate service. There are also early diagnosis, speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, which are all designed to give children the extra step up that they need so that they can try to participate.

Slough has a new in-borough autism service, which is situated in the early years centre, so it is very connected with education, ensuring that children can be diagnosed and get access to services early, which is what parents want. So, the quality protects service is a practical programme that is actually making a difference.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned diagnosis and having multi-agency assessments. He is aware of the NIASA—national initiative on autism: screening and assessment—guidelines. I am pleased to be able to tell him that Dr. Gillian Baird, the secretary of NIASA, has been appointed as a member of the disabled children's external working group, which is working on the children's national service framework. Clearly, her views and the work that she is doing will be fed into that NSF, which is very practical. Rather than having guidelines in isolation, they will form part of an extensive programme under the NSF and there is a clear focus on that.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman raised multi-agency assessments. He asked whether we would issue guidance to local authorities to say that all the agencies should come together to undertake the assessment. There must be nothing more frustrating for families than having to tell their story time and again to a multiplicity of individuals. I am delighted to be able to say that we have already issued statutory guidance under the quality protects programme. This is about moving from service-led assessments to looking at the child—putting the child at the centre of the assessment and asking what he or she needs, rather than what is the boundary of our agency, and what contribution we can make. That is quite a culture shift for some services—saying that this is the child's pathway or journey. It is similar to what we are trying to do in the national health service by asking what is the patient's journey. We are working out how to configure services to meet the needs of the child.

Mr. Bercow: The Minister is dealing very thoroughly with my questions. Does she agree that it is important that a child should have an alternative between, on the one hand, education in a mainstream school but in social isolation, which is what Christian currently endures, and inclusion in a special school in an atmosphere that may not be suitable? Surely there should be a spectrum of choice and opportunity, just as there is a spectrum of disorder.

Ms Blears: That is exactly the situation that we are trying to work towards. We want to provide services that are more flexible and responsive, which look and feel different and actually are different from those that we have been used to. We have embarked on that journey—we have to get from where we are now to where we want to be. Multi-agency assessments that ask what the child needs and trying to challenge services to configure themselves so that they meet the needs of that child will take some time, but that is very much the direction of travel. Those services will be valued and will make a difference to the long-term outcomes for children.

The third issue that the hon. Gentleman raised related to education and training, which are absolutely central. If we are to have early diagnosis and intervention, we must ensure that such issues do not go unnoticed for years and years. I am delighted to be able to tell him that in July the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills published some good practice guidance—exactly what he highlighted. It was produced by the autism working group, so we are very much in tune with our partners. The group was made up of experts and practitioners on the whole spectrum of autism disorders.

The document provides guidance on raising awareness and improving understanding of the disorders and draws on good practice throughout the country. It asks local education authorities and schools to keep their provision under review and to audit it, to provide monitoring and quality evaluation. If the provision available is not of the right quality, it will not have the impact wanted by parents and families. That guidance has been issued, so I am pleased to give the hon. Gentleman those reassurances.

In addition to the legislative framework that we have set up and the practical measures on the ground, a third important aspect is the children's national service framework. Whenever we talk about a specific service, it is crucial that we try to connect it to the rest of the machinery and the existing organisations; otherwise we end up with specific programmes for specific parts of the community. That is not the way to obtain sustainable mainstream provision that meets the needs of a whole range of people in our community. Sometimes, it is necessary for projects to pump-prime and kick-start things, to get innovation going and to set up pilots. However, the needs of children with autism are increasingly and equally important in the general thrust of the children's national service framework. They are very special children but they should be included in our mainstream thinking rather than being on the outside as "special" children.

Under the national service framework, there will be a series of exemplars for the design of optimum service. I am pleased to tell hon. Members that one of the exemplars will focus on children with autism, so there should be some good work arising from that to show what a good service for those children should look like.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that in the past services for children with autism have been extremely poor and that families have often been left in isolation to cope on their own. We all acknowledge that.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I congratulate the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on

[Mr. Russell Brown]

securing the debate. I appreciate both that it concerns autistic children and that my hon. Friend the Minister is winding up her remarks. However, may I draw one point to her attention? It has been raised by some of the families with whom I have been in contact during the past couple of weeks. I realise that the hon. Member for Buckingham was talking about only one young man, but will my hon. Friend to consider the point that children grow up—even if she cannot address it this evening? There is a problem in my area, and possibly elsewhere: children have support and services but as they go through the transition to adulthood they fall between two stools and the support and service back-up which was available when they were children suddenly disappears. There is a large gulf as they move into adulthood and we need to address that.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right. The transition to adolescence is difficult in the best of circumstances, but for children with autism the difficulties are multiplied. It is crucial that there are good, high quality support services for young people.

We do not always turn our minds to young people as a group. We do things for children and for adults, but young people are sometimes extremely vulnerable and I shall certainly take my hon. Friend's point on board.

We have taken a number of positive steps forward. There is a good legislative framework and some excellent practical projects are under way. We have put in more investment; as I pointed out, the grant next year is about to double to £30 million a year. Together with that investment, we need reform to find new ways of working, especially with our partners in the voluntary sector organisations, but I hope that in future the experience of the constituent of the hon. Member for Buckingham will not be replicated and that more flexible and responsive services will be in place to support families and children.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 16 October 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HSBC INVESTMENT BANKING BILL [*LORDS*] (*BY ORDER*)

BARCLAYS GROUP REORGANISATION BILL [*LORDS*] (*BY ORDER*)

Orders for Third Reading read.

Read the Third time and passed.

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL

Motion made,

That the promoters of the Mersey Tunnels Bill shall have leave to suspend proceedings thereon in order to proceed with it, if they think fit, in the next session of Parliament, provided that notice of their intention to do so is lodged in the Private Bill Office not later than the day before the close of the present session and that all fees due up to that date have been paid;

That on the fifth sitting day in the next session the bill shall be presented to the House by deposit in the Private Bill Office;

That a declaration signed by the agent shall be annexed to the bill, stating that it is the same in every respect as the bill presented in this House in the present session;

That on the next sitting day following presentation, the Clerk in the Private Bill Office shall lay the bill on the Table of the House;

That in the next session the bill shall be deemed to have passed through every stage through which it has passed in the present session, and shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having passed those stages;

That no further fees shall be charged to such stages;

That all petitions relating to the bill which stand referred to the committee on the bill, shall stand referred to the committee on the bill in the next session;

That no petitioners shall be heard before the committee unless their petition has been presented within the time provided for petitioning or has been deposited pursuant to Private Business Standing Order 126(b);

That, in relation to the bill, Private Business Standing Order 127 shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against bill)' were omitted.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Wednesday 23 October at 7 pm.

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

Motion made,

That Mr John Hayes be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Mr Peter Luff be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered tomorrow.

ENGLISH NATIONAL STADIUM REVIEW

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Final Report made by Mr Patrick Carter in October 2002 in respect of the English National Stadium Review.—*[Mr. Caborn.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister was asked—

Affordable Housing (London)

1. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): What plans he has to increase the availability of affordable homes in London. [71949]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): We are working on a range of measures, for both the short and the long term, to ensure that more people have access to an affordable home in London. For 2003–04, £482 million of the Housing Corporation's programme will go directly to London projects, along with a £200 million challenge fund to encourage quick delivery of 4,000 new affordable homes in the south-east through off-site manufacturing.

Mike Gapes: I am grateful for that reply, but does my right hon. Friend accept that London faces an acute housing crisis? Many people cannot afford to live and work in the city. Is not it time that we invested far more in social housing, instead of selling off the social housing that we have? At the same time, should not we recognise the needs of those London boroughs that do not have much land but which have serious problems with people on their housing lists? Should we not give those authorities the right to nominate people for the new social housing developments in the Thames gateway and elsewhere?

Mr. Prescott: I agree a great deal with my hon. Friend. Resources are important. Since the Government were elected in 1997, we have tripled the resources devoted to housing, raising the figure from £1.5 billion to £4.5 billion in the third year of the spending review. However, the problems are immense. On 18 July, I mentioned in the House that, by the end of this year or

the beginning of next, I would make a statement about how we will apportion the resources available in the community housing programme.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): The Deputy Prime Minister has made it known in recent months that he does not approve of the right to buy. In stressed areas such as London, he believes that it leads to a reduction in the availability of affordable housing. The outcome has been a panic in London, with applications for the right to buy doubling in many London boroughs. Will he comment on that?

Mr. Prescott: I have made it clear that we have not challenged the right to buy. The Government have brought before the House housing proposals that would have given us the opportunity to restrict the right to buy had we wanted to do so. As I have pointed out, housing problems in certain areas of London have reached such a crisis point that we need to act in a variety of ways, and that includes giving consideration to the right to buy. I chose to use legislation introduced by the previous Conservative Government that laid down that there could be restrictions on the right to buy in 25 rural district areas. I believe that homeless people in inner-city areas are just as important as those in rural areas.

David Davis: The Deputy Prime Minister seems to be getting excited, but I have looked forward for some time to this occasion today. I was going to say that he and I are old sparring partners, but his history and my broken nose mean that that phrase could be misinterpreted.

It is interesting that the Deputy Prime Minister highlighted the fact that he is interested in restricting the right to buy. We are not talking about rural areas today, although I have some sympathy with that argument. However, in the five years that the Government have been in power, homelessness in London has doubled. The Government need more imagination in what they are doing, instead of resorting to the simple ideological nonsense that the Deputy Prime Minister has come up with.

The Mayor of London has proposed that new development in London should be 50 per cent. affordable. At first sight, that proposal appears very good, but many experts think that it would drive development down or out of London. Will the Deputy Prime Minister give his opinion on that proposal?

Mr. Prescott: Perhaps I should have welcomed the right hon. Gentleman to his position, although I am confused about whether he is shadow Deputy Prime Minister or shadow Secretary of State; there are different interpretations according to who is asked, but I welcome him to whatever position it is.

On the right to buy, I think I have made the position clear: we want to consider the matter where there is a homelessness crisis, and that is certainly the case in some inner-city areas and in London. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned a new policy at his party conference whereby about a million people in housing associations would have the right to buy. I should inform the House that that is not a new policy; it was announced by Mrs. Thatcher in 1979 and for 20 years the Conservatives were unable to implement it because they could not get a majority for it in the House. Not only is the policy not new, it is completely uncosted and, frankly, has nothing to do with the right to buy, but only the right to become the Leader of the Opposition.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I welcome the Government's examination of the housing crisis facing people in the inner city, especially inner London. Does the Secretary of State accept that unless there is a substantial increase in affordable rented housing in inner London, the poor will simply be exported from the city? Will he also intervene when local authorities, such as Islington, are deliberately selling off vacant property and buildings that could be converted into affordable rented housing, to ensure that the working-class and poor people of this city can continue living in this city and do not become just a prey to property speculation?

Mr. Prescott: I agree with what my hon. Friend says, especially that the right to live in the city is equally as important as the right to buy and that those rights are in conflict. That is why I have asked my Department to look carefully into the circumstances and I hope shortly to be able to report our conclusions to the House.

As for how many houses should be built in those areas, I am looking into that problem and will report back to the House.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am not surprised that the Deputy Prime Minister is confused about the Conservatives' alleged new policy on the right to buy when, only five months ago, their then housing spokesman, the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), referred to the right-to-buy scam. Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that, with 100,000 empty homes in London, one way to solve the housing problem would be to bring some of them back into use? Is it not a disgrace that, if someone wants to build a four-bedroomed, double-garage, mock-Georgian house on a greenfield site, they pay no VAT, yet they have to pay full VAT at 17.5 per cent. to renovate empty properties? Should not VAT be equalised for both at 5 per cent?

Mr. Prescott: That sounds like quite a good policy—we have advocated it from time to time. The hon. Gentleman must await the Chancellor's decision; hon. Members would not expect me to give a judgment, although I might have a view on tax matters.

The hon. Gentleman's comments about empty houses are absolutely right— we have not done anything about that. I point out to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), whatever his title may be, that all parties have to take some blame. As I said on 18 July, it would be much better if we took more opportunities to improve the situation for the homeless rather than making political propaganda out of it.

The point about empty houses is obvious and I am looking at the matter, including the incentives that might be involved in achieving the objectives. I am taking a comprehensive view.

Public Service Agreements

2. **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): If he will make a statement on progress with local PSAs. [71950]

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): We have concluded negotiations and signed agreements with 61 local authorities, including 20 that were involved in the pilot stage of this scheme. We are concluding negotiations with 19 authorities and have started others with a further 13 authorities. A schedule for negotiations has been agreed with the remaining authorities that wish to take part in the scheme.

Tony Wright: I am grateful for that answer.

In the spirit of the new localism, will my hon. Friend ensure that the spirit of the local public service agreements, which were widely welcomed as representing a real partnership for improvement between central and local government, is not lost in the new comprehensive assessment regime but made central to it?

Mrs. Roche: I agree with the important points made by my hon. Friend. Local agreements are essential to local delivery. The best thing about the scheme is that it enables local authorities not only to agree national targets but to deliver the objectives wanted by local people in their area.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Can the Minister tell us the annual cost of monitoring these over-bureaucratic local PSA targets?

Mrs. Roche: I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the figures, but I would be careful about criticising them if I were him because all political parties in all the local government organisations warmly welcome them. Indeed, Kent county council, which is controlled by the party that he supports, is a great supporter of them.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I thank the Minister for rejecting the notion that local PSAs are a bureaucratic encumbrance—there is local authority enthusiasm for them—but will she focus on the aspect that relates to the decent homes standard to ensure that local authorities are not caught in a different trap where the obligations to meet energy efficiency targets are in conflict with their commitments to provide safe housing areas in which people can live?

Mrs. Roche: That is an important point, and my hon. Friend has a very honourable record in this area. The good thing about those schemes is that local authorities and other agencies in the voluntary sector can negotiate with us directly to make sure that they get aims of that kind.

Local Government Finance

3. **Richard Younger-Ross** (Teignbridge): What progress he is making on the review of grants to local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the methodology he is using. [71951]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The formal consultation on options for the formula grant distribution system closed on 30 September. We will consider the evidence, the pressures and the points made before we take decisions. Those decisions will be announced in the 2003–04 provisional settlement around the start of December.

Richard Younger-Ross: Does the Minister accept—he partially did in the debate that we started yesterday and have still to continue—that the present methodology is extremely complicated? Would it not be better to move from the present grant system to a fair system, abolish the present Tory council tax and have a system based on ability to pay, such as a local income tax?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is confusing two separate elements in the local government finance framework. The Liberal Democrats' local income tax proposals are, as I understand them—they are a confused party with somewhat confused proposals—designed to be an alternative to the council tax. What we are discussing under the formula grant distribution is Government grant and how it is distributed between local authorities. That in no way relates to raising any form of local revenue through local income tax.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): As part of the review, will my right hon. Friend consider how to implement the Government's policy of helping coalfield areas? That policy is directly contradicted by making those areas, such as Derbyshire, subsidise the wealthier, less deprived counties through the area cost adjustment—the home counties subsidy.

Mr. Raynsford: Several issues have been raised during the consultation about particular indicators and measures that would be significant to coalfield communities. Some of the issues that we have considered have also related to rural, former coalfield areas with relatively sparse populations that have suffered the consequences of the decline in the traditional industries, so we are looking at the detailed factors in coalfield areas and, indeed, in all areas. I hope that, when we publish our proposals, my hon. Friend will understand that we have been doing our best to replace the unsatisfactory standard spending assessment with a fairer, more transparent and better system.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): Does the Minister agree that those local authorities that find that their grant will be supported by the floor next year, but get specific grants for a large proportion of their funding this year, may find his promise that they will be no worse off pretty hollow?

Mr. Raynsford: No; the hon. Gentleman is wrong. We have given a clear undertaking that no local authority will suffer a cash loss as a result of the change in

formula. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members get very excited about this. I have explained time and again—let me do so once more so that they may eventually come to understand—that we will have a floor, which we expect to be substantially higher than the guarantee that I have already offered. Until we have received all the data, including information on up-to-date school populations, it is not possible to come forward with floors because we do not have the information on which to reach a prudent and sensible judgment. While the Conservatives are becoming increasingly irresponsible in financial matters, we believe that we need to be prudent and responsible.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I am sure that my right hon. Friend would agree that, in reforming the distribution of Government grant to address what are perceived as injustices, it would be very sad if we were to introduce fresh injustices. I fear that that might happen if sufficient cognisance is not taken of high housing costs, which would greatly affect unitary authorities such as mine that have high social deprivation in association with extremely high housing costs, which create terrible problems.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a valid point in highlighting the particular needs in some areas with very high costs. He will appreciate, however, in the light of the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber), that there are concerns about the area cost adjustment in areas of low cost. One of our dilemmas is trying to reconcile the many conflicting claims of different areas, which see the need for changes in the system that will advantage them. Our job is to achieve a balance, reach a judgment and produce a system that is the fairest possible combination of factors, recognising the different pressures facing different areas.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Dealing with the specific grant element of the reforms, does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the director of inspection at the Audit Commission, Mr. Paul Kirby? He has said:

> "The idea that you give freedom to the people who are already achieving is quite perverse. The real issues are the councils in the middle and the failing ones which actually just need a lot more freedom."

Does he also agree with Mr. Kirby that pinning down councils is causing a problem?

The right hon. Gentleman has been at the Department for many years. When did he realise that the Government's reforms were causing damage to local authorities? When does he expect that local authorities will have the degree of freedom that they had under the last Conservative Government?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman should perhaps consider employment in a comedy show, because his last question indicates a remarkable lack of sense of reality. The last Conservative Government were responsible for the greatest act of centralisation of powers, taking powers away from local government, controlling local authority spending, abolishing local authorities and interfering again and again in local democracy. I am delighted that the Conservatives have had a death-bed repentance and that they will follow our Government in giving freedoms and flexibilities to local authorities.

On Mr. Kirby, we not only agree with him—although not on that particular point—but have just employed him in central Government. He will be taking up a new post helping us to improve delivery. On that point, I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on whether he really believes that it is perverse to give additional rewards and support to successful authorities to encourage them to do even better. He will be in a minority of one if he believes that.

Local Government Ombudsman

4. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): If he will make it his policy to introduce legislation to require local authorities to implement recommendations of reports from the local government ombudsman. [71952]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): To maintain the independence of the public sector ombudsmen, the Government do not intend to shift the balance and compel local authorities to implement all ombudsmen reports. Councils are accountable first to their electorates. However, audit and inspection will become more important for local government as the new system of comprehensive performance assessment comes into effect.

Kevin Brennan: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in this era of earned autonomy and modernisation, local authorities should be made to be accountable when citizens successfully show themselves to have been the victims of municipal maladministration?

Mr. Leslie: I certainly agree that local authorities should be held to account. However, they should primarily be held to account by their electorates rather than by putting ombudsmen into a management structure above them. The ombudsmen do not wish to have such binding power, but I understand my hon. Friend's sentiments.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the Minister reconsider this matter? I agree with the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan). If someone goes through the procedure of going to the local ombudsman and the ombudsman gives advice and makes recommendations, surely the local authority should implement those recommendations. They usually are implemented but, if they are not, does that not make a mockery of the ombudsman's role if he cannot—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is far too noisy. That is unfair to the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I think that I have made my point.

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman certainly did. The ombudsmen say that they are dissatisfied with only about 3 per cent. of local authority responses to recommendations.

It would not be right to jeopardise the ombudsmen's independence, but I am sure that we all want local authorities to respond fully and comprehensively to the ombudsmen's recommendations.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): There are usually two parts to an ombudsman's recommendations, and local authorities often go along with recommendations to change policies. However, in some cases, ombudsmen recommend financial compensation. What right does the citizen have to receive that compensation when a council says that it is not going to follow an ombudsman's recommendations?

Mr. Leslie: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but we must get this in proportion. Local authorities implement fully and satisfactorily the vast majority of ombudsmen's recommendations. Ultimately, if people are not happy with their local council's response, they should hold it to account at the ballot box.

Regional Government

5. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): What the cost of the regional government establishment in England is in 2002–03. [71953]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the legislation for the elected regional assemblies is not yet in place, so there has been no cost in this financial year. However, we fund a number of regional bodies. For example, we fund at a cost of £100 million a year the government offices for the regions that were introduced by the Conservative Government and we are making available grants of £5 million to the eight regional chambers in this financial year.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware of the increasing public concern at the size and cost of the massive new regional bureaucracies in Cambridge and elsewhere, particularly when no one is terribly sure what they do apart from organising conferences and consultation exercises? I specifically wish to ask whether there are any European obligations pertaining to this. If there are no such obligations, will he agree to scrapping regional government and saving a great deal of taxpayers' money?

Mr. Prescott: I thought that I had made it clear that we have not established regional government yet, so it is not there to scrap. Most of the bodies that have been set up with regional dimensions came under the Administration that the hon. Gentleman supported even though we were a member of the European Community. I point out to him that the number of Tory members of the regional chambers that he wishes to scrap has increased from 130 to 150. Three regions are dominated by Tory council members, so perhaps he should address his remarks to them, including Councillor Howard Briggs, who is from his constituency and sits on the East of England regional assembly.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will my right hon. Friend congratulate the North West regional assembly on its recent work in Brussels in lobbying European Commissioners to continue funding the objective 1 area on Merseyside and the rest of the north-west? Does he look forward to the day when directly elected regional assemblies have the power to bring more support and investment to the north-west, the north and other regions of this country?

Mr. Prescott: I compliment all regional assemblies on doing an excellent job in checking what the regional development agencies do. It is the one part of democratic accountability that we have introduced to existing bureaucracy and I believe that it is welcomed by Tory, Labour and Liberal members who sit on the assemblies. Regional assemblies do an excellent job. The House and the Select Committees are aware of that and we should acknowledge it.

County Councils

6. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What recent representations he has received from representatives of county councils about the future roles, functions and responsibilities of these councils; and if he will make a statement. [71954]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Ministers are in regular dialogue with county council leaders and chief executives on a wide range of issues, including finance, planning and, more recently, the White Paper on regional governance.

Mr. Luff: The Deputy Prime Minister is planning to sideline Worcestershire county council and other county councils on planning. He is planning to fine Worcestershire county council social services department if it does not do what the Government want. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills is bypassing Worcestershire local education authority and controlling schools direct from Whitehall. The Deputy Prime Minister is planning to perpetuate the unfair funding of Worcestershire county council. He is also planning to abolish Worcestershire country council to create the monstrous regional governments. Our county councils have served us well for so long. What does he have against them?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Gentleman should calm down and take a breath. There are no plans and no threats to county councils. Indeed, in terms of regional government, the Boundary Committee for England has not precluded letting county councils be unitary authorities. We should let the people choose in a referendum what to do about regional government.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [71978] **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 16 October.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I met ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I will have further such meetings later today. I also spoke this afternoon to President Megawati of Indonesia.

Mr. Brady: In the past six weeks, the Government have missed their targets for literacy and numeracy; they have failed in their target on truancy; they have presided over the chaos in criminal records checks; and they have seen the destruction of all confidence in the A-level system. The Secretary of State for Education is the most accident prone Education Secretary in history. Why does the Prime Minister not sack her?

The Prime Minister: For this reason: we have the best primary school results that this country has ever seen and literally hundreds of thousands of children, who used to be in classes of over 30, are now not as a result of the measures introduced by this Government. In addition, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and constituencies up and down the country, we have put extra investment into our school buildings, our computer facilities and the schools themselves, and every single penny piece of it was opposed by the Conservative party.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): May I associate myself with my right hon. Friend's comments yesterday? It is the innocent and poorest people of Indonesia and, indeed, Iraq, who suffer most from such vicious attacks. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will pursue with vigour those responsible for those pernicious attacks? Will he share with me the regret of the family of a constituent of mine, young Stephen Speirs, who lost his life in the tragedy in Bali?

The Prime Minister: First, I am sure the whole House would want to join in giving to the family of Stephen Speirs our deepest condolences and sympathy on his tragic murder in Bali. I assure my hon. Friend and other hon. Members that we will do everything we can both to ensure that we prosecute those responsible for the atrocity in Bali and to take action across the world to do everything we can to root out this scourge—this evil—of terrorism, which can strike at any place in the world. His constituents today will be feeling all the grief for the loss of their son, and many other people in the country will be in the same position. We must ensure that more families in the future do not suffer in the same way, which is why we have to take the action we have set out.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I start by associating myself with the Prime Minister's remarks about the victims in Bali?

In July, the Prime Minister told me:

"head teachers . . . have . . . the power to exclude pupils who have been violent towards their teachers."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 978.]

Since then, a school in Surrey has been told to reinstate two boys who threatened to kill their teacher. Does the Prime Minister now regret giving appeals panels the right to overrule head teachers on school discipline?

The Prime Minister: No. Of course it is right that head teachers should have the ability to exclude their pupils, but there is an appeals panel procedure, which, as I understand it, was introduced in 1987. It is important, however, that we make sure that the decisions of appeals panels are sensible. I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that only a small number of the exclusions were appealed against and the number of appeals upheld was about 3 per cent. of the overall exclusions.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister needs to recognise that in 1998 his Government gave appeals panels the right to overrule schools on exclusions—it did not happen before that. He also needs to remind himself that the teachers at Glyn technology school have refused to take back the children concerned, and as a result his Education Secretary is making a fool of herself, blundering around all over the place, trying to resolve a crisis that she does not have the power to resolve. Surely the simplest thing for the Prime Minister to do is admit that he and his Government have made an honest, straightforward mistake, scrap the appeals panels and give teachers back the power to ensure that there is discipline in their classrooms.

The Prime Minister: No. As I pointed out to the right hon. Gentleman a moment ago, the appeals panels were introduced in 1987 and have been working since then. In 2001, we made it clear in an amendment to the statutory guidance that

"appeal panels should not normally recommend the reinstatement of pupils where there has been serious actual or threatened violence to a teacher or fellow pupil."

In addition, from January, there will be a teacher on every panel, an absolute requirement to balance the interests of the whole school against those of the pupil and no scope for overturning exclusions on a technicality. It is not true to say that this Government introduced the appeals panels—they were introduced under the previous Government. Nor is it true to say that we have not tightened the appeals procedure, because we have in the way that I have just described.

Mr. Duncan Smith: As usual, everybody is to blame but the Prime Minister and his Government. He is confused, because he gave those appeals panels the power to get pupils back into schools. He knows it, and he will not own up to it. But head teachers up and down the country, such as those whom I met in Manchester and Birmingham this week, all say the same thing: they cannot maintain discipline if they are constantly overruled by bureaucrats, which is what the Prime Minister has made possible.

I remind the Prime Minister that there are now four times as many attacks on teachers as there were five years ago, when he took office. Forcing schools to keep such pupils does not help the pupils; it does not help the teachers who want to teach and it disrupts the children who want to learn. Why does not the Prime Minister take this opportunity simply to say that he will scrap the appeals panels, as he has the power to do, and sort out this problem?

The Prime Minister: I will not say that I will scrap the appeals panels because I do not think that it would be the right thing to do. However, we are making it clear that we would normally expect any pupil who threatens a teacher with violent behaviour to be excluded. The

right hon. Gentleman says that head teachers up and down the country all have their decisions overturned, but I point out that 3 per cent. of decisions are overturned.

It is important to realise also that, as a result of the additional measures that we have introduced and the amendments that we have made to guidance, there is greater protection for teachers. I am not saying that this is not an issue; it is, for precisely the reasons to which the right hon. Gentleman has drawn attention. We have amended the statutory guidance. To try to suggest that appeals panels were introduced by this Government, and introduced to constrain head teachers, is simply factually wrong, and it does nothing to advance the debate on education in this country.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Metropolitan police youth services and young offending teams on their work in reducing youth crime? In particular, will he support my local youth project in Kensington and Westminster, which has run successful summer action programmes, and Operation Puma, aimed at cracking down on antisocial behaviour, which is helping to implement £3 million-worth of Government investment in behaviour improvement in schools? Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a long way to go, and can he assure me that, now that the summer is over, the youth service and connection programmes will continue to have the highest priority in bringing about a sustained reduction in youth crime?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that, as a result of the changes that have been made, we ensure not merely that there is big investment in summer programmes for young people but that any child who is permanently excluded from school is now in full-time education, as opposed to being left to roam the streets with a minimum of two hours' education a week. In addition, as a result of the measures taken by the Metropolitan police, street crime has fallen in London. I can assure my hon. Friend that both the investment and the necessary changes that have worked such improvements in her area will be applied across the country.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Will the Prime Minister tell the House under what circumstances he would refuse to support unilateral military action by the United States against Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I am not going to speculate on the basis on which we will or will not support military action in Iraq. I simply say that I have made it very clear in the House that I want this to proceed on the broadest possible basis of consent. That is why we have the process under way at the moment in the United Nations. I have also said—and I repeat—that the United Nations has to be the way of dealing with this issue, not the way of avoiding dealing with it.

I believe that we will achieve a consensus internationally. The reason for that is that I think that most people, when they reflect on the matter, understand that weapons of mass destruction are an issue, understand that it is not safe for the world to allow Saddam to have chemical, biological and, potentially, nuclear weapons, and understand that the world community must make it clear that he has to be disarmed of those weapons. I hope that it is done through the UN, and that is what I am trying to achieve.

Mr. Kennedy: The Prime Minister is undoubtedly genuine in believing that the fight against terrorism can be accompanied by preparations for possible military action against Iraq; that the two can and, indeed, must go hand in hand. Will he acknowledge, however, that the successful building of an international coalition against terrorism, including across the political spectrum in this country, could begin to fracture if unilateral action is taken against Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I certainly understand the concerns that people have about unilateral action. It is precisely for that reason that I have tried to achieve a situation where action is taken through the United Nations. I also think that people in this country are sensible enough to realise that we cannot do nothing about a regime as despicable as Saddam's, which has chemical and biological weapons and is trying to develop nuclear weapons.

I would have thought that most people could agree that this is the right way forward: the United Nations lays down very clearly to Saddam that he must disarm himself of those weapons and co-operate fully with the weapons inspectors. If he does so and disarmament happens peacefully, then conflict is avoided; but if he refuses to co-operate or to allow the inspectors to do their work, the international community will face a choice: either its will or authority will have been flouted and it will have done nothing about it, or it will have faced up to the fact that its will had been flouted and acted. I happen to believe that where the UN's authority is challenged in that way, we have a duty to act. I would hope that the right hon. Gentleman would agree with that.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): Does the Prime Minister accept that company activities must be made more accountable and transparent? Will he give an undertaking that the next companies Bill will include a commitment to mandatory social, environmental and financial reporting?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give a commitment in precisely those terms, but the issues that my hon. Friend raises around social responsibility are the subject of discussions at the moment between the Department of Trade and Industry and business. We hope that we can make some progress on that, although I would want to do so in a way that minimises any potential bureaucracy or regulation.

Q2. [71979] **Mr. Paul Keetch** (Hereford): Does the Prime Minister agree that the United Kingdom must develop as many alternative renewable energy sources as possible? Is he aware of the proposal in Golden Valley in my constituency for what could be the largest UK land-based wind farm, which would put up to 50 turbines—*[Interruption.]* There would be up to 50 turbines twice the height of Hereford cathedral. As the proposal is too

large to be considered by the local authority, does he agree that the only way that both positive and negative views of local people can be heard is by a public inquiry?

The Prime Minister: I cannot say to the hon. Gentleman that I am an expert on the Golden Valley wind farm proposal, but I am somewhat helped. Propcsals for any such power stations above a certain capacity are considered by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. However, it says here that no such application has been made to build a wind farm at Golden Valley—*[Laughter.]*—so I am slightly at a loss. I assume that the hon. Gentleman knows his constituency better than the people who brief me, so perhaps an application has been made; if so, I will have to write to him to correct what I have just said. Obviously, we are aware of the Liberal Democrats' strong support for—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wind."] What can I say other than that this is one area on which I think we can work together?

Q3. [71980] **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): Given the profound misgivings about the private finance initiative revealed by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants survey, and following the Capita-caused chaos in school staff screening, is it not about time for a fundamental review of that most costly and misconceived of policies; and should not our leadership end its five-year love affair with private financiers and get back to basics in public service delivery?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid the short answer is no—I do not agree with that at all. We certainly will not scrap PFI. The reason for that is simple: up and down this country, it is delivering hospitals, schools and improvements to our public services. I know that from my constituency, where it has delivered a brand new community hospital and is delivering improvements to local schools. It would be wholly irresponsible of us to get rid of it. The fact is that it has resulted in an additional £4 billion of investment in this country. Under the old way—under the Conservatives and, indeed, the last Labour Government—we never had anything like the capital programme we now have flooding into our public services. This is one occasion on which we are at our best when at our boldest.

Mr. Duncan Smith: When Mike Tomlinson, the man leading the inquiry into A-level regrading, describes the exams system as

"an accident waiting to happen",

what will the Prime Minister do to guarantee that the current crisis will not happen again next year?

The Prime Minister: We of course take full responsibility for it, and it is important that we learn the lessons, which is precisely what we are doing. Mike Tomlinson will complete his report in the next few months. We shall then make sure that—as we did with the lessons he outlined recently—any lessons he outlines in that report are learned and implemented.

Mr. Duncan Smith: But many of those lessons were evident long before the Tomlinson report. Mr. Tomlinson has said that now nobody—teachers or pupils—has any idea what an A-level is. He admits that at the heart of the current mess is the fact that AS-levels are too easy—we know that the examination boards thought that. However, we also know that parents, teachers and pupils feel that the AS-level places too great a strain on them during the course of their two-year studies. Surely the Prime Minister has a simple answer in front of him: why does he not simply do away with the AS-level?

The Prime Minister: I will tell the right hon. Gentleman why we will not do that. Let me explain how AS-levels came into being. In 1996, the Conservative Government set up a committee under Sir Ron Dearing: that committee recommended AS-levels. The then Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment—now the shadow Leader of the House—said:

"Sir Ron has . . . proposed introducing a new advanced subsidiary—or AS—qualification, representing the first half of a full A-level . . . We have already welcomed those recommendations",

adding, "We expect" them

"to be in place by September 1998."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. 1178-79.]

That formed part of the Conservative manifesto in 1997. We took over that consultation process, which yielded 66 per cent. of respondents in favour of AS-levels. The only change we made was to delay implementation from 1998 to 2000. That is why we do not believe that it is sensible to scrap AS-levels.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I say to the Prime Minister that when it's wrong, it's wrong and there is no point in trying to pretend that it's right. He has in front of him five years—*[Interruption.]*—of looking at that examination and all the reports that have come back from teachers and parents—*[Interruption.]*.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should leave the shadow Leader of the House alone.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I must say that I thought that it would be a fine day when Labour Members would pray in aid my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the shadow Leader of the House.

The Prime Minister has in front of him all the evidence from parents and teachers, and from all the assessments that have been made, that the AS-level examination, since being implemented, has failed. So the right hon. Gentleman has a simple choice. Right now, faith in A-levels has been shaken to the core. No one even knows whether they are worth the paper that they are written on. Why does he not accept that the AS-level is a failure and that it is time to scrap it?

The Prime Minister: That is not what the Tomlinson report found at all. Secondly, when the right hon. Gentleman says that A-levels are not worth the paper on which they are written, that is a gross insult to teachers and pupils throughout the country. This has been an immensely difficult time for students, but only slightly more than 1,200 had amended grades—about 4,000 have their grades amended every year in the normal

way; and 168 students may have to change their universities. It is wrong that they should have been put in that position. We accept full responsibility for that. However, to say to students that A-levels are not worth the paper on which they are written is totally irresponsible.

I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what most parents would fear, and that is what was outlined at the Conservative party conference when it was said that the aim of the party in public services was to complete the Thatcher revolution. That is what would worry most parents. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are nodding their heads. That is exactly what they want to do. What is more, parents would be worried also by the commitment given at the Conservative party conference that Conservatives would not support the extra investment in education.

Parents will have a clear choice between the Government, who believe in equality of opportunity and access for our students, and the extra investment to sustain that, or the Opposition, who want to continue the bad old days of the 1980s and have opposed the investment that our schools need.

Mr. Speaker: I call Andrew Miller. [Hon. Members: "More."] Order.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): As someone who has spent all his adult life as an active trade unionist, I have had to write to members of the Fire Brigades Union locally to tell them that I think that the claim that has been submitted is ill-founded. As much as everyone believes that the fire fighters have a case that needs to be examined, they have gone over the top with their claim. Will my right hon. Friend set out the Government's position so that fire fighters throughout the country know that they have the Government's support but realise that the claim, as it stands, is ill-founded?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We support, of course, the work that fire fighters do. They do a fantastic job. However, we cannot support the wage claim because it amounts to 40 or even 50 per cent. In circumstances where inflation is as low as it is, no Government could support such a claim.

Secondly, we have offered a fully independent review under Sir George Bain, who is highly respected by those within the trade union movement as well as outside it, to look into the claims of the fire fighters. Unfortunately, at present the union leadership is saying that it will not co-operate with that review in any way.

We have tried to do our best to ensure that there is some objective basis on which we can study the claims that are being made. I ask the union leadership to co-operate with Sir George's review. If it refuses to do so, it must understand that we as a Government, trying to act responsibly in terms of the public interest, could not support a 40 or 50 per cent. wage claim. The only result of that would be problems throughout the public services and a rise in interest rates that would do no good to anyone.

Q4. [71981] **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Following the introduction of the national minimum wage, why do the Government insist on retaining an agricultural wages board?

The Prime Minister: Because the agricultural wages board has enormous support from agricultural workers in the industry who fear that if the board is not there, their wages may be put down unfairly. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's question implies that he supports abolishing the agricultural wages board—

Hugh Robertson *indicated assent.*

The Prime Minister: He does. I do not know whether his question implies that he does not support the minimum wage.

Hugh Robertson *indicated assent.*

The Prime Minister: He does support the minimum wage. Well, we are getting somewhere! If he supports the minimum wage, I suggest that it is sensible to support a board that makes sure that there is a floor underneath agricultural workers' wages.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): May I ask the Prime Minister to join me and most of the House in sending good wishes to the England team for the match against Macedonia—[Hon. Members: "And Wales."]—and Wales, and Northern Ireland? Will he take this opportunity to make his feelings clear about the appalling racist abuse of Ashley Cole and Emile Heskey in the match against Slovakia at the weekend? Will he use his good offices to impress upon UEFA that unless there is a vigorous and sustained campaign against racism in European football, it will not go away? The cancer does not cure itself.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the whole House joins in the good wishes to the English team tonight, and of course to the Welsh team also—and when we get round to it, to the Scottish team and the Northern Ireland team as well. My hon. Friend makes a serious point about racism. We must make sure that that does not come back into the game in our own country. Also, I hope that the football authorities take very firm action in respect of any country where such racism rears its head. The scenes in Slovakia were disgraceful. I think that people understand that, and I hope that the authorities there take the appropriate action against those responsible.

Q5. [71982] **Mr. John Taylor** (Solihull): How can it be right to punish the law-abiding parties in Northern Ireland by suspending the institutions, rather than excluding the only offending party, Sinn Fein-IRA?

The Prime Minister: There are two reasons why we took the decision that we did. The first reason is that to have said that the IRA had come off ceasefire would

have been a serious thing to do, and we had to weigh carefully the consequences of that. The second reason is that, without support from the nationalist community as well, an exclusion motion would not have succeeded, so we would have been back to suspension in any event. We do not want the suspension to last. We hope that we can find a way forward, but we have reached the crunch point where people must decide whether they are committed to exclusively peaceful means or not. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House a long time, and he will recall that the previous Conservative Government faced tricky and difficult issues over these matters, particularly concerning the IRA. I hope that we get some understanding from the Opposition that we are trying to negotiate our way through an immensely difficult situation. If one looks back over the five years of the peace process in Northern Ireland, one sees, I believe, that, despite everything, it has brought considerable gains to the people of Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is worth making every effort to secure a way of putting the agreement back together again and moving it forward. The only basis on which that will happen is if it is made very clear by everyone, in word and deed, that exclusively peaceful and democratic means are the only way that people can be in government.

Q6. [71984] **Andy King** (Rugby and Kenilworth): My right hon. Friend has received many letters from the people of Rugby and the surrounding constituencies of Warwickshire and Coventry strongly opposing the building of a giant new airport in the green belt between Rugby and Coventry—an option that has no support whatever in the midlands. Does he agree that the best way forward is to use our existing airports better and more wisely to minimise environmental damage and achieve truly sustainable development in air transport for many years ahead?

The Prime Minister: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's concerns, which he has articulated on behalf of his constituency. The reason that the issue arises is that we had to put forward all the options. We have not made decisions on any of those options at all. That will come when we publish the White Paper on the air transport plan some time next year. I assure my hon. Friend that we will listen carefully to the points that he and others are making.

Q7. [71985] **Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan: In terms of the Prime Minister's responsibilities for upholding standards in public life, does he accept that if a political party fails to declare the proceeds of a fundraising dinner attended by a major drugs dealer who is subsequently shot dead, it might be in danger of bringing politics into disrepute? Will the Prime Minister call for and support an investigation by the Electoral Commission under the relevant legislation, and will he discuss these matters with Mr. Jack McConnell?

The Prime Minister: As has been said, if there are such allegations, they should be made to the appropriate authorities, which will investigate them.

Q8. [71986] **Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that, night after night in our communities, citizens are subjected to not only mental but physical pressure from the yob culture? Will he send today the strongest and clearest message not only to the victims, but to the thugs and louts who engage in this practice? Will he assure the House that he will make this issue a priority, ensure that adequate funding is available and return communities to the law-abiding and decent people who live in fear at the present time?

The Prime Minister: I know that the Scottish Executive has proposals to deal with the issue, including the investment of a significant sum in tackling antisocial behaviour. I am sure that the whole House will agree with my hon. Friend that one of the biggest problems that local communities face is the degree of antisocial behaviour that occurs. That is why we introduced antisocial behaviour orders and are now piloting fixed-penalty notices. I believe that the Queen's Speech will outline certain other measures that will allow us to tackle antisocial behaviour in any way we can. In particular, it is right that the Government deal with the issue and we are committing a massive amount to inner-city regeneration and have introduced the new deal, the working families tax credit and sure start. We are entitled to demand in return proper, respectful and law-abiding behaviour. That is what the vast majority of people in communities such as his want, and that is what we are determined to implement.

Duty Free Imports (Personal Use)

3.31 pm

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to create a system of prior approval by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise for duty free imports for personal use; and for connected purposes.

I arrived at this place on the Order Paper today in an attempt to rationalise four increasingly strained forces in the arena of personal imports to the United Kingdom. They concern the importation of duty free goods and goods on which duty has been paid abroad. First, the United Kingdom is part of the European Union, where jobseekers, residents and businesses can come and go throughout what was meant to be a truly free market. We have a right to cross our borders into the EU and are, indeed, encouraged to do so. I remain one of those who still believe passionately in the Common Market principle.

Secondly, the increasing use by all Governments of indirect taxation that has dramatically exceeded that levied elsewhere in the EU is a process that has been accelerated by the remorseless promotion of stealth taxes since 1997. That has created the incentive to make legitimate use of cross-channel travel to import goods—principally alcohol and tobacco—for personal use. I can think of few other reasons for voluntarily spending a never-ending period on an overcrowded ferry on a dark October evening on the English channel. If the UK Government had not seen those goods as a soft target for taxation, the existing price differential would have been substantially reduced.

Thirdly, we are seeing the Customs and Excise equivalent of military overstretch. Customs budgets are often seen as a soft touch and the codewords "intelligence-led operations" are substitutable for reduced manpower, which covers the country so as to leave the stable door ajar for covert smuggling operations. Resources are at a premium, as is illustrated by the recent revelation in an inquiry conducted by the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs of the fact that the service in Scotland does not have access to one detection sniffer dog. Instead, that dog is on "intelligence-led standby" from Hull or Manchester.

The Bill is intended to focus scarce resources on the genuine problem: organised smuggling operations. The price differential has created a much more sinister and despicable trade. Hon. Members will know of many independent retailers in their constituencies who are paying the price of regular smuggling for resale. Consistent abuse by individuals and groups of free-flowing traffic between the United Kingdom and our neighbours puts at risk the future of many independent businesses and UK jobs.

The regional media in the south-east of England were surprised that an hon. Member with a constituency that is a long way north of Watford raised the issue. They should know that the effects of illegal smuggling reach far beyond the south-east. Convenience stores and supermarkets in Newton Stewart and Stranraer are only too aware of the effect on their businesses. Legitimate sales are all but eliminated in some areas of the country by illegitimate trade in smuggled goods. For example, smuggled goods account for more than 20 per cent. of cigarette consumption in the UK as opposed to the 7 per cent. of legitimately imported goods. It is little wonder that smoking started to increase again in 1997. The low street price of smuggled tobacco proves a dangerous attraction to the new generation of vulnerable young smokers.

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is doing what it can to restrict the illegal trade, but with increasingly limited resources. It is struggling to make the distinction between legitimate import and illegal trafficking. The Bill would introduce a voluntary procedure and assist Customs and Excise in making the distinction.

The system's premise is simple. United Kingdom residents who want to visit the continent with the principal or secondary aim of bringing back goods for personal use should be able to do that. If the goods are genuinely for personal use, those people are most likely to use a system of prior notification. Conversely, those who undertake illegal activity are least likely to notify Her Majesty's Customs and Excise of their trip in advance. If Customs officers used the system properly, they could prioritise their scarce resources and concentrate on travellers who had not given prior notification of their trip.

With the House's agreement, I shall engage with Customs and Excise to develop a workable system of prior notification. It must be administratively simple and must facilitate easy analysis by officers at the ports.

If prior notice were given of a trip by the same vehicle on three separate occasions in three months, the service might deem it suitable to use the information as sufficient intelligence for stopping and inspecting it. If someone gave prior notification of one trip in five years, perhaps to gather continental beverages for one of those 40th birthday parties for which Galloway is famous, it would be reasonable to assume that Customs resources would be best targeted elsewhere. Surely that is simply common sense.

Hon. Members know about the publicity that surrounds ordinary members of the public who have vehicles confiscated when apprehended by Customs and Excise officers. It would be much more straightforward to identify those who were attempting to smuggle for commercial gain if we could presume in favour of those who had gone out of their way to inform the authorities in advance of their journey. A constituent of mine, Mr. Andy Shiells from the Machars in Galloway found no such system in place. He wanted to do the decent thing and advise Customs and Excise of the trip in advance, but was unable to do that. The Bill will put that right.

I do not propose an increase in state surveillance or support for big brother. Curiously, the system needs to be voluntary to be most effective. The Bill would not compromise the right of Customs officers to inspect anyone entering the United Kingdom, pre-registered or not. They must retain the ability to act on intelligence. However, the House must accept that more accurately targeted resources are increased resources, at no cost to the taxpayer.

The Bill is not a smugglers' charter. It is intended to provide a system whereby honest and law-abiding UK citizens who want to import for personal use can do that without feeling like criminals. They have a right to use the Common Market, just as those who try to abuse the system have the right to expect that our limited Customs and Excise resources will focus on their activities.

[Mr. Peter Duncan]

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Peter Duncan, Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger, Mr. Paul Goodman, Mr. Peter Atkinson, Mr. John Baron, Mr. Mark Field and Mr. Christopher Chope.

Duty Free Imports (Personal Use)

Mr. Peter Duncan accordingly presented a Bill to create a system of prior approval by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise for duty free imports for personal use; and for connected purpose: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Thursday 14 November, and to be printed [Bill 194].

Opposition Day

[18th Allotted Day]

Department for Education and Skills

3.41 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I beg to move,

That this House expresses its sympathy to the pupils, parents and teachers affected by the fiasco of grading this year's 'A' level exams; condemns Ministers at the Department for Education and Skills for proceeding with the new system of 'A' levels in the face of expert advice; regrets the confusion this has caused in university entrance both this year and next; calls for the Qualification and Curriculum Authority to be made independent of Government; further regrets the confusion caused by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills over her powers on exclusion appeal panels; expresses its sympathy to the teachers at the Glyn Technology School in Ewell for the problems this has caused; calls for the end of the current system of appeals panels and the introduction of the option of enforceable contracts between schools and parents; notes that the problems for schools caused by the backlog at the Criminal Records Bureau are continuing; regrets that there is no sign of a reduction in truancy numbers; and further notes that the Government has failed to hit its targets on primary school attainment and that the Secretary of State has failed to repeat the pledge of her predecessor to resign if these targets were not reached.

It is right and proper that this House should, for the second day in a row, be dealing with the failures of the Department for Education and Skills, because those failures spread far beyond the A-level fiasco that we discussed yesterday. Wherever we look in our education system, from primary schools to universities, we find missed targets, demoralised teachers and angry students. Ministers' complacent performance over A-levels shows how far they are out of touch with the reality of the world of education. They should know that there is a rising tide of discontent among those who work hard to keep our schools, colleges and universities going. Heads and teachers are doing their best to help children. Ministers delude themselves that they can provide the solution. Mostly, Ministers are the problem. Non-stop intervention, meddling, pointless initiatives and meaningless targets have left teachers crying out to be allowed to get on with their job of teaching.

The underlying problem with this culture of non-stop intervention is that, too often, there is no substance behind it. The most telling phrase to describe the Secretary of State's approach is the description of her secondary school policy as being like a doughnut, in that

"It has icing on the top and nothing in the centre."

It is a telling criticism, because it comes from her deputy, the Minister for School Standards, talking privately—or so he thought—to Sir William Stubbs. Hell hath no fury like a senior official sacked as a scapegoat. I look forward to hearing more of the views of the Minister for School Standards on his Secretary of State's policies.

Let us look in detail at some of the Secretary of State's recent interventions. There are five areas that need to be covered in this debate. Those involve the serious problems that have hit the Department since the House rose for the summer at the end of July, so this is just two and a half months' worth of disasters. There are many more, and I know that many colleagues on both sides of the House will want to add to the list during this short debate.

Let us start with the most extraordinary failure of the Secretary of State: the mess that she has helped to create at the Glyn technology school in Ewell, where an appeals panel has insisted that two boys excluded for issuing death threats to a teacher should be let back into the school. This is an extraordinary failure because she has managed to make a bad situation worse, even though almost no one disagrees with her. Of course the two boys should not be let back into the school. What they did to the teacher concerned was a disgrace, and I am not surprised that the head and the other staff feel as strongly as they do. But if ever there was a time for quiet diplomacy behind the scenes, it was last week at the Glyn technology school.

The parents have legal rights—because of the appeals panel system that we have just heard the Prime Minister defending—and they are insisting on exercising them. Instead of quietly helping the school and the local education authority, however, the Secretary of State saw the chance for some easy headlines about how tough she is. She must have known that she had no power to back up her tough talk. All that she succeeded in doing was to raise the temperature, so that there is still no solution.

Councillor Kay Hammond, who is now responsible for sorting out this mess, summed up the effect of the Secretary of State's intervention. [HON. MEMBERS: "She is a Tory."] Labour Members are complaining that Kay Hammond is a Tory, as if that makes a difference. It is a great shame that Government Members are playing politics when a councillor is trying to solve a difficult problem in a good local school that is threatened by a national crisis.

Kay Hammond wrote to the Secretary of State saying that her intervention

"was not helpful because we were trying as a matter of urgency to find a way forward in a very difficult situation."

She went on to say:

"Unfortunately, all the attention, exacerbated by"

the Secretary of State

"acting beyond her powers, has made Surrey's job almost impossible at present."

That is a damning indictment of the right hon. Lady, even though she has acted in a way that all of us would support. No one in the House thinks that those boys should be back in that school, but Surrey county council has been trying to act effectively, and not jump on a bandwagon, as the Secretary of State did.

In the spirit of inclusiveness that pervades the Conservative party these days, I offer the Secretary of State some suggestions of positive action that she could take to avoid this mess in the future. First, she should get rid of appeals panels. Even without the bad decisions that they reach, they are expensive, legalistic and take too long to come to a decision. I agree with the National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers that these panels should go. Heads and governors should have the power over discipline in a school. If the heads and governors get an exclusion process seriously wrong, the local education authority should be the appeal point. *[Interruption.]*

Secondly, I offer the Government another of the policies that we unveiled last week. *[Interruption.]*

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): That is an interesting new policy. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that Conservative policy is not, as I had thought until a minute ago, to abolish appeals panels, but to make the LEA the appeals panel instead of the present independent panel?

Mr. Green: The hon. Lady should listen. Of course, we want to abolish appeal panels, but a due process must be operated. *[Interruption.]* There could be a simple appeal to the LEA. The right hon. Lady seems to be particularly ignorant of her own policies, as she misbriefed the Prime Minister, who looked extremely foolish when he claimed that the appeals panels that were established under a Conservative Government had the power to do what they have done, which was not true. That was done under an Act that the right hon. Lady introduced.

Estelle Morris *rose—*

Mr. Green: The right hon. Lady has had her chance. What the Government have been saying all along as an argument against the abolition of appeals panels, which we support, is that that would bring the courts into the equation.

Estelle Morris *rose—*

Mr. Green: The right hon. Lady should contain herself for a second. As I understand it, the Government's objection to the abolition of appeals panels is that that would bring in the courts. That is a ludicrous objection, because it is impossible for the courts to be much more legalistic than the appeals panels already are. She must know, as I do, of head teachers who have had to spend in excess of £20,000 on individual appeals. We believe that that £20,000 would be better spent on books, teachers and equipment in our schools.

The right hon. Lady knows as well as I do, that if we are to avoid a legal process, which is expensive, bureaucratic and takes a long time, in law there needs to be an appeal in case the process is wrong. The simplest and cheapest way is for the LEA to carry out the appeal. I do not know why she objects to that.

Estelle Morris: Can we be clear about this new policy, which is being developed on the hoof? Having given LEAs the power to carry out the exclusion appeal hearing, will the hon. Gentleman also give them the right to overrule decisions of the head teacher and the governing body?

Mr. Green: Only if the process is wrong. The right hon. Lady should have listened to me. *[Interruption.]* I can tell that the amount of legal knowledge among Government Members is less than it should be. Like every MP, she should be aware of the powers of people such as ombudsmen, who cannot take hearings of fact but can take hearings on legal processes. The difference should be clear to every Member of Parliament, but it appears not to be clear to Labour Members. I can only assume that none of them has ever *—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) must be heard.

Mr. Green: I can only assume that no Labour Member has ever taken up a constituent's case with an

[Mr. Green]

ombudsman, and that the simple difference between problems with process and problems with fact has therefore never occurred to any Labour Member.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: I want to make some progress.

Let me offer the Government another of the policies that we unveiled last week. Why does the Secretary of State not allow heads, if they wish, to insist on binding contracts with parents setting out their schools' disciplinary codes? Parents would then know that they had some responsibility for their children's behaviour even when they were inside the school gates.

Both those policies would have a beneficial effect on situations such as the one affecting Glyn school, and either would be more effective in the long run than the Secretary of State's talking tough when she cannot act tough.

That was just one of the October crises, but let us move on to one of last month's horrors—the failure of some schools to open for the start of term because of a backlog at the Criminal Records Bureau. I am aware that that is partly a Home Office problem. If the Secretary of State is feeling sore about her predecessor and what he has done for her reputation, let me assure her that I shall come to the primary school targets in a moment. The real scandal of the Criminal Records Bureau, however, is that things are getting worse. The backlog is now at a record high. Errors have led to 100 people being wrongly accused of having a criminal past. Thousands of applications have been stuck in the CRB system for up to seven months, and nearly 4,000 completed checks have been disputed by applicants.

The problems that that is causing are particularly acute in education. One of the teacher supply agencies, Time Plan, has said that it still awaits the results of dozens of CRB checks. Local education authorities have experienced delays as well. Essex county council has 400 outstanding applications, 50 of which were submitted during last April and May. Even by the standards of this Government and this Department, that is spectacular incompetence.

The Secretary of State is getting used to apologising. Another person to whom she should apologise is Donna Naseby of Whitley Bay, who has been unable to open her day nursery on time because her CRB disclosure took 15 weeks to arrive. We have all sat here for some years listening to the Government explaining how important early-years education is, but that same Government, through their own inadequacy and bureaucracy, are preventing nurseries from opening.

The Secretary of State might also like to apologise to a teacher who has written to us from Daventry. I hope Ministers will listen, as they say that they are in favour of teachers. This teacher writes that he has done

"20 years unblemished service as a teacher and . . . passed the threshold for enhanced pay."

He writes

"In August my name was removed in error from the Northants supply teachers list, the LEA informed me that to be restored to the list I must be checked by the CRB, and to add to the insult, pay the fee. On August 30th I took the completed Form and various credentials to"

the relevant building

"where they were checked by a clerk and the Form taken in . . . On or about the 26th September I received a letter . . . asking for more proof of identity. I returned the necessary documents on the 30th September . . .

I telephoned the CRB this morning"—

the letter is dated 8 October—

"and was told I would have to wait a further 6 weeks! Without the Certificate Northants Schools will not want to employ me as a Supply Teacher. I have therefore had no opportunity of working for Northants since the commencement of the new school year, and for at least the next 6 weeks, making 3 months in all. I am apparently not entitled to unemployment benefit and cannot improve my Teachers pension."

If the Government are presiding over crises like that, they should be apologising to more people than A-level students.

Roger Casale: Whether we are talking about appeals panels, AS-levels or extra resources for literacy and numeracy, does not the policy of the hon. Gentleman's party—as we heard from its leader a few moments ago—amount to little more than "Scrap it, scrap it, scrap it"? As his party's education spokesman, has the hon. Gentleman anything positive to say about raising education standards? If he has, when will he get on with saying it?

Mr. Green: This party has many things to say about raising standards, the first of which is that we need better standards of discipline in our schools. We will provide that by supporting heads and teachers with home-school contracts—which, had the hon. Gentleman been listening, he would have just heard me recommend to the Government—by scrapping appeals panels and by allowing students in class to learn and not be disrupted by a small minority of disruptive pupils.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Before my hon. Friend leaves the question of the Criminal Records Bureau, he should recall that the public may have appreciated this matter over the summer to a much greater extent than beforehand, not least because of events in Cambridgeshire. However, it should have been amply evident to the Government that things were going wrong and that action was not being taken. Cambridgeshire county council wrote to the chief executive of the Criminal Records Bureau in March. I had correspondence with Ministers in July. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) had a debate in July. Ministers blithely worked their way towards disaster in August and September without taking a grip, just as they have done on so many other issues.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is exactly right. I suspect that Members of this House on both sides have heard tales about the problems with the CRB. I know that the teaching unions alerted the Department as long ago as last April that a crisis was coming. Extraordinarily,

no one in the Department appeared to grasp the basic fact that the school year starts in September and that more teachers need to be processed in August than in any other month of the year. It was only in August that the Department panicked and took one decision, followed by a flatly contradictory one when the Secretary of State got back from holiday in September and realised that many schools had not opened. It was a classic case of how not to do it.

Phil Hope (Corby): I have just been on the phone to a number of teenagers in my constituency who recently passed their A-levels. They were watching Prime Minister's Question Time. They were absolutely shocked and furious to hear the grades that they achieved described as not being worth the paper they were written on. One of them received four grade As at AS-level and three grade As at A2-level. Will the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity, on behalf of the Conservative party, to dissociate himself from those remarks and apologise to the thousands of teenagers slandered by the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Green: The people who should be apologising are the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for what they have done to the A-level system. For 50 years, A-levels were the gold standard in education in this country. In five years, the Government have managed to destroy that gold standard.

The Criminal Records Bureau was the second disaster. The third disaster that the Government have had in the last two and a half months is in their truancy policy. On 9 October, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg)—who sits here, quietly chuntering to himself—announced yet another range of tough measures on truancy, to follow the last range of tough measures on truancy that he announced on 18 June. By coincidence, this latest tough package was released on the same day as the new truancy figures, which showed that, despite all their initiatives, the Government have completely failed to cut truancy at all.

According to the Government's own figures, exactly the same number of half-days are lost through unauthorised absence as in 1997–98. The Government have made no progress, despite the fact that one of their first promises was a drastic cut in truancy. In December 1998, in the comprehensive spending review public service agreements—on which the Prime Minister was so keen a few moments ago—the Government promised a reduction by one third in school truancy by 2002.

As 2002 approached, the Government realised that they were going to miss the target. A sensible Government would have taken some measures to ensure that they hit the target. Not this Government; when they see that they are going to miss a target, they change the target, which is what they did. They dropped the 1998 target, hoping that no one would notice; sadly for them, we did. They replaced it with a target to reduce truancy by 10 per cent. from the 2002 level; the House will recall that that there has been no reduction in that level since 1997, which was the previous target. The Government's policy on truancy would be laughable were it not so serious.

The director of Truancy Call, a charity dealing with truants, revealed that, on a typical school day, some 50,000 children are playing truant in this country. That is a genuinely terrifying statistic. If the Government took some effective measures against truancy, they would probably do more than anything else to stop too many vulnerable young people getting on the conveyor belt to crime. Sadly, they have failed to take any effective measures, and their response to that failure is not to try to find effective measures, but to fiddle the figures.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): What measures would the hon. Gentleman take if he were the Minister responsible?

Mr. Green: The most important long-term measure that we learned about from other countries—*[Interruption.]* The Government are addicted to short-term measures—a fact never better displayed than by that reaction. The best thing to do for most of those 50,000 children is to make school relevant to them. The biggest historic failure in our education system, going back some 100 years, is that of vocational education. We need to provide excellent, world-class education for the less academic children, as well as the more academic. Frankly, under successive Governments we have failed to do that. This is one of the most important long-term changes that we need. One hugely beneficial side-effect would be that the school day would be relevant to all pupils at all levels of academic attainment. That is the long-term way to treat truancy.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: I have given way enough in the past few minutes.

The fourth recent disaster to hit the Secretary of State was the primary school attainment figures, which were published last month. They showed that the Government missed their key targets for English and for mathematics among 11-year-olds. On this, I have some sympathy with her personal plight. When the Home Secretary was doing her job, and he made his now notorious pledge that he would resign if the targets were not hit this year, we all knew that, by 2002, somebody else would be carrying the can. Sadly for the Secretary of State, it is her.

There are three key issues that the Secretary of State could, and needs to, address. First, in her tough-talking moments she has been prone to saying that heads and teachers in failing schools will have to go. So if schools do not hit their targets, someone takes responsibility and goes, but if Ministers do not hit their targets, no one takes responsibility and no one goes. The next time the Prime Minister complains about cynicism in modern Britain, he might like to look close to home to find some of the causes. Secondly, since the Secretary of State is not hitting the existing targets, what on earth is the point in setting new and more difficult ones for future years? Can she tell the House what she proposes to do if those targets are missed as well?

Thirdly, the right hon. Lady will see that improvements in both English and mathematics have completely stalled in the past three years. The figures

[Mr. Green]

have barely moved, and about a quarter of our children leave primary schools unable to read, write or count at an acceptable level. I dare say that she and I would agree that that is completely unacceptable. If we look at the figures for 2000, 2001 and 2002, we see that they have not moved. Literacy and numeracy hours have done some good, but it looks as though radical change will be needed to move the attainment figures from the plateau on which they are stuck. So far, her Department has shown no sign of recognising that the figures are stuck, and that radical change is needed to achieve anything better. This debate provides a chance for the Secretary of State to make it clear that she sees the scale of the challenge. So far, all that we have had from the Government is bluster, but when a quarter of our young people are leaving primary school unable to read, write or count properly, that is a national disgrace.

The fifth and most serious of the current crises is, of course, the A-level fiasco.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten the House as to the proportion of 11-year-olds who did not meet basic standards in mathematics and reading when we took over?

Mr. Green: Rather than bobbing up and down with Whips' questions, the hon. Gentleman should listen to what I just said. I said that the literacy and numeracy hours have done some good. The figures went up from the mid-1990s to 2000. Since 2000, the English figures have stuck at 75 per cent., and the mathematics figures have fluctuated between 71 and 73 per cent. *[Interruption.]* Government Back Benchers can chunter as much as they like, but the fact is that we are stuck with a quarter of our primary school pupils being inadequately educated. If they are happy with that, fine, but I am not, and Britain's parents will not be happy with it either.

The fifth and most serious of the current crises is, of course, the A-level fiasco. Yesterday, the Secretary of State tried the old trick of defending herself against a charge that no one in the House was making—that she interfered personally to fiddle the grades—while trying to ignore the charges made in this House and by many teachers, parents and pupils. Those charges are that she presided over a system that was bound to fail, and that she had been warned that it would fail.

The Secretary of State said yesterday that no one had warned her. I remember Nick Tate, the QCA's former chief executive, saying that the QCA had warned her that the system was about to fail. She rejects the charge that she ignored the warnings, because she has no defence against it, and she has no defence against it because it is true.

Today's reports on the latest Tomlinson findings must make fairly grim reading for the Secretary of State. The editorial in today's edition of *The Independent* stated:

"This episode has shredded confidence in the integrity of England's exam system",

and I am delighted to read that newspaper saying what I said yesterday.

Most serious of all, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition noted in Prime Minister's questions, is that Mike Tomlinson said yesterday that schools are left with no idea of what an A-level is. The Secretary of State is fond of quoting the parts of Mike Tomlinson's report of which she approves. I hope that she has analysed carefully what he said yesterday. He challenged the Government over A-level reforms by warning that the qualification was clouded in confusion. He said that it was "amazing" that schools were in the third year of the changes brought in under Curriculum 2000, yet still did not know what examiners expected of students. I think that he is being especially polite.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the Leader of the Opposition that today's A-levels are worthless?

Mr. Green: That is not what my right hon. Friend said. Mike Tomlinson has said that schools are left with no idea of what an A-level is. If this Government believe that they have not damaged the reputation of that exam—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is the Chamber, and hon. Members should be listening to the debate, not shouting.

Mr. Green: If Labour Members seriously believe that the Government have not damaged the reputation of A-levels, I can only suggest that they visit secondary schools when they return to their constituencies. They will find a lot of angry students and teachers, who feel that they have been working very hard for a long time but that they have had their efforts undermined by an incompetent Government.

The point that Mike Tomlinson makes is that the QCA had direct responsibility for the problems, and I think that that point commends itself to the Secretary of State. Where the Secretary of State is at her most evasive is in denying that she is responsible for the QCA. It is perfectly simple. If she can sack the chairman of the QCA, then she is responsible for the QCA. If the QCA is responsible for the A-level scandal, she is responsible for that scandal. That is the inescapable conclusion of all the facts that have come out so far.

I hope that the Secretary of State is suitably embarrassed by what she said about the QCA as recently as 17 June. She said:

"I am sure that the talented staff at the QCA can meet these tough challenges for the benefit of pupils, teachers and parents. I would also like to pay tribute to the work of its Chairman, Sir William Stubbs. Sir William has played a key role in putting the QCA in the position where it can reform for the future."

That is what the Secretary of State thought in June. By September, when she needed to save her own skin, she sacked the very official to whom she had paid tribute.

What brings all those disasters together is the characteristic new Labour cocktail of centralisation, meddling from Whitehall, and lack of trust in the professionals on the ground. The Government fiddle the figures when they can, and ignore them when they cannot. They show a touching faith that a press release equals ministerial action. Our schools deserve much more than the Government offer. Heads deserve real

power to run their schools. Teachers deserve to be trusted to know how to teach. Pupils deserve an exam system that they can trust, and parents deserve to know that their children will be safe from disruption in the classroom. The present Government are failing on all those counts, and their failures are a betrayal of young people across the country.

I commend the motion to the House.

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"applauds the priority the Government attaches to education and congratulates the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on her excellent leadership of the education system; notes the current record levels of sustained investment in education with an increase from £41.6 billion in 2001–02 to £57.8 billion in 2005–06; welcomes rising standards and progress being made in schools up and down the country, congratulating in particular all those who played a part in achieving the best ever results in literacy and numeracy for 11 year olds, with 75 per cent. making the grade in English and 73 per cent. in mathematics compared with less than a half in 1997; welcomes the importance the Government attaches to tackling indiscipline and non-attendance at schools; notes that while the Criminal Records Bureau continues to improve its performance, the Department's interim "List 99" measures are allowing schools to operate with a full complement of staff; expresses its sympathy for the pupils, parents and teachers who have been affected by the recent 'A' level grading problems; but congratulates the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for her decisive action in setting up an independent inquiry under Mike Tomlinson to restore confidence in the exam system."

I was not impressed by the words—many of them—of the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). Many people who work in our schools and many parents whose children are educated in our schools will not recognise the picture that he painted.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The right hon. Lady always says that.

Estelle Morris: I always say that because it is always the case.

Before we go on to the specific allegations, let us clarify what progress has been made during the past five to six years and what we have achieved in partnership with our teachers, governors and all who work in our schools. That achievement was made against the background of massively increased investment in our schools. By 2005–06, we shall have invested more than £1,100 extra in every school pupil, and every Member of Parliament will be able to see evidence in their constituency of the huge capital investment that we have made—not only in primary and secondary schools, colleges of further education and universities but in nurseries, where previously they did not exist, and in sure start. Almost all three and four-year-olds now have a nursery place.

All that investment and leadership from the centre has brought real results. Nearly 500,000 five to seven-year-olds are no longer in classes of 30. We made that pledge in 1997 and we have met our target. Ofsted notes that almost seven classes in 10 are good, compared with four in 10 only five years ago. People with children in classes where Ofsted judges that the quality of teaching is better are glad that a Labour Government are in power and are showing leadership.

More than nine in 10 schools have made satisfactory or better progress since their last inspection. Fewer schools are going into special measures: last year, there were 137, compared with 230 in the previous year. Ofsted rates the current generation of teachers as the best ever.

I am not complacent about that, but I take pride in the contribution that the Government have made, as a partner in the education service, in ensuring that none of our infants is in classes of more than 30 and that all our four-year-olds and 70 per cent. of our three-year-olds have the chance of early years provision. Yes, a quarter of our 11-year-olds have still not reached the standards in reading and writing that we expect of them, but only six years ago half of them had not done so.

That is a massive improvement. Not only the Government but the whole nation should be proud of the literacy and numeracy strategies. They are world class and world leading. They are admired throughout the world. I do not think we could find anyone in the education system—head teacher, teacher or parent—or in the wider community who would not give thanks for the introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategies.

Yes, the strategies have stalled, but they did so after increases of 12 percentage points for maths and 11 percentage points for English over five years. The question is: what do we do now? If the hon. Member for Ashford had chosen to examine the figures in a little more depth, he would have found that each year we assessed the results not only for literacy and numeracy in general for each of their component parts; that in the next year we invested more money, training and support; and that we often saw progress.

It is interesting that two or three years ago, writing standards were falling behind, whereas those for reading were increasing. What did we do? We made extra investment, adjusted the strategies and provided extra training. What happened? Writing improved. However, reading has stalled. What that reveals is not a political point but an educational one: the capacity of the system to concentrate on writing, which we required, while maintaining the necessary focus on reading.

As a politician, I do not have an answer to that problem, but we are looking into it. We know that we attained higher levels for writing. We know that previously we reached higher levels for reading. The task is to build capacity into the system and to ensure that heads, teachers and all those who work with them can maintain their focus on both reading and writing. That is how we shall move closer to our target.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I shall finish dealing with this issue before giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

The literacy and numeracy issue is really difficult. No generation of educationists, nor any previous Government, have ever even tried to crack the problem of people leaving our education system without the basic skills. That is why 7 million adults do not have the reading and number skills that we would expect of 11-year-olds. We are making a good attempt. We are

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investing the money and our approach is evidence based. We are working with those in the profession, whom I thank. We have made immeasurable and massive progress. No, we are not there, but I would tell the hon. Member for Ashford one thing: we will not give up, and we will continue to invest and to try until we have moved even further towards our target.

Chris Grayling: The most recent research into why teachers are leaving the profession says:

"The resignation rate from schools is rising sharply"—

it has risen by 4 per cent. since 1999. It also says that nearly 40 per cent. of those leaving the profession cite Government initiatives as one of the reasons that they are going. Does the right hon. Lady think that our education system may have stalled because so many experienced teachers are leaving the profession?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman will also know, if he is into reading research, that even more people are now joining the profession, and they do so knowing what it is about. They see the investment that the Government are making, the literacy and numeracy strategies raising standards and the excellence in cities scheme, which is beginning to close the gap in achievement levels between children in inner cities and elsewhere. That is why we have more teachers in the profession than at any time since the early 1980s. I am proud of that, but, equally, I take the challenge of keeping people in the profession.

I shall write to the hon. Gentleman if I am wrong about this, but if my memory serves me right—I do not have the figure in front of me—it is true to say that five years after teaching 80 per cent. of those who have completed their training have taught for some time in the maintained sector. Many teachers who leave school will return after having had time out to raise a family or because they have moved to another part of the country.

I do not underestimate the nature of the challenge in retaining teachers in our classrooms, but I hope that, in return, the hon. Gentleman will give credit for the fact that we have the best recruitment levels for two decades and that, today, more teachers are serving in our classrooms, teaching our children, than since the start of the 1980s.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Estelle Morris: Not at the moment; I want to move on, because I am sure that the House will want to know of other targets that have been met as well. I am sure that hon. Members will be pleased to know that our target for the number of 16-year-olds who get five good GCSEs at grades A to C was met a year early. I am sure that, like me, they look forward to the publication of the next set of results tomorrow. I am sure that they will be as pleased as I am that, for the first time, the Government's initiatives—yes, initiatives, but they were funded and training for them was provided, about which I am proud—are the first ones to close the attainment gap in standards in this country.

More than in any of our competitors in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, this country's under-achievement is linked to poverty and social class. The best thing about the literacy and numeracy and the excellence in cities initiatives is not only that standards increased across the board, but that the attainment gap closed, and they are the first education initiatives of any Government of any political party to achieve that.

If the hon. Member for Ashford wants to abolish those initiatives, he should say so now, as I believe he has done in the past. Let us make no mistake: taking away initiatives such as literacy and numeracy, key stage 3 and excellence in cities would be at the children's cost because, without those initiatives, teachers would not have the support that they need to do what we want them to do—raise standards across the board.

Sir Patrick Cormack *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I will give way, and then I shall make progress on another issue.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I commend much of what the right hon. Lady seeks to do. I particularly commend the Government's new realism in education, but does the right hon. Lady accept that the reason for the crisis that she is seeking to correct is that for many years, not just under Labour Governments, there was a blind pursuit of the comprehensive ideal, which did a great deal to destroy standards and quality in education in this country?

Estelle Morris: All I would say is that the performance of girls has increased in the past couple of decades, as has the number of youngsters who have qualifications enabling them to go on to higher education. That has happened on the back of the comprehensive system, not some rigid selective system that existed previously. I am proud of the comprehensive ideal, but, as the hon. Gentleman will know, I think that we need to renew it. It has not achieved all that I aspire to. It has not closed the social class gap, and some ethnic groups are achieving below the level at which they should. That is exactly why we talk about reforming the comprehensive principle, while the Prime Minister and I talk about the post-comprehensive ideal.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Would the Secretary of State therefore agree with the Minister for School Standards, who said in Brighton last week that he regretted the passing of the direct grant grammar schools? Do the Government plan to return those to the state fold?

Estelle Morris: I shall say three things: first, my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards did not say that; secondly, I always agree with him; and, thirdly, we have no plans to introduce the direct grant system.

I want to move on to the very serious issue of exclusions. It is fascinating that a new Tory policy has been announced only minutes after the Leader of the Opposition sat down and forgot to tell us that the Conservatives believe in appeals hearings after all. I want to correct something that the Leader of the Opposition said during Prime Minister's questions.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that appeals panels were introduced in 1986, and the following justification was given in Committee proceedings on the Bill that I presume became the 1987 Act:

"a parent may genuinely feel that an authority has taken insufficient notice of the pupil's point of view of the difficulties arising through its endorsement of a decision to expel. The parent may continue to feel that expulsion is unjustified, or the expelled pupil may be at a critical stage of preparation for school-leaving examinations. An alternative school may pose problems of accessibility, or the parent may be unhappy about the curriculum offered by that school."

That was the justification given by Chris Patten when he spoke about the introduction of appeals panels in a Standing Committee in 1986. He was right. People must have an avenue to seek redress if they feel that injustice has been done. I cannot understand, however, why the Leader of the Opposition went on to say that we took away from the head teacher the right to overrule the appeals panel, as the following was also stated in Standing Committee on 1 July 1986:

"We therefore propose that . . . When an authority confirms an expulsion the parent would have a . . . right of appeal . . . Such appeals would be to appeal committees established under section 7 of the Education Act 1980."

Chris Patten went on to say:

"New clause 10 provides that a committee's decision should be binding".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 1 July 1986; c. 389–90.]

Would the hon. Member for Ashford like to answer to the House and withdraw the accusation made by his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition during Prime Minister's questions?

Mr. Damian Green: What my right hon. Friend said was that the Government changed the guidance, which was true.

Estelle Morris: I stand to be corrected when *Hansard* is published, but I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that the Leader of the Opposition said that the appeals panel could not overrule the decision of the head. Chris Patten, who was the Minister at the time, said that the appeals panel decision would be binding.

Let us move on—instead of going over the quiet words of a quiet man—to consider the more vocal, louder comments of the hon. Member for Ashford, who, to tell the truth, is an equally quiet man. Today, he announced that, although the appeals panel will be abolished, the local education authority will resume the function of hearing appeals from parents. When he announced that, I had an eerie feeling that not one of his Back Benchers knew about it. Now we know what is the definition of a quiet man and a quiet party—it means not telling Back Benchers about the policy before announcing it to the House of Commons.

Let me be helpful by spelling out what that policy means. It will mean that any parent who disagrees with the judgment of the head that their child should be excluded for any reason will be able to appeal to a local education authority. That is what was said. Let us make no mistake—if we give the local education authority the right to hear the appeal, we have to give them the right to overturn the judgment. If we do not do that, we will take away its power to take a decision.

I am happy to give way on this issue, so would the hon. Gentleman like to tell us who will sit on the LEA appeal panels? Will they be made up of the teachers who we insist should sit on panels from January next year? If the panel is run by an LEA, will it be made up of local councillors and local education officials? If it is not made up of councillors and education officials, will it be made up of independent members of the public? If it is made up of independent members of the public, I am not sure how it will differ from the independent exclusion panels that we have at the moment.

Mr. Green: The right hon. Lady appears incapable of listening. She said that I had just said that any parent would be able to appeal on any matter to the LEA. She knows perfectly well that I did not say that. She was not listening and she wants to hear what she wants to hear. I made a clear difference between process and fact, and that is an obvious point that applies to all appeals to people such as the ombudsmen. She should know that, because she is experienced enough to know the difference. She may be attempting to be malicious, but I am afraid that she will not find that I said what she said I had said.

Estelle Morris: I heard the point about process and fact, but I did not have the slightest idea what the hon. Gentleman was on about. That is why I had to intervene.

Let me explain what I think stage two of the new policy will be, because the hon. Gentleman has now mentioned guidance.

Chris Grayling: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Estelle Morris: No, not at the moment.

I think that the Opposition's new policy means that not every parent will have the right to go to the LEA to seek the overruling of the head teacher's and governing body's judgment. Some parents will have that right, and others will not. Whether they have the right will depend on guidance written by the hon. Gentleman. If that is the policy, that is fine. However, we have heard all the time from the Opposition that never under any circumstances should the head teacher's judgment be second-guessed because it is absolutely sacrosanct. No matter how the hon. Gentleman tries to get out of it, he has just said that, in certain circumstances that he has not yet described to his Back Benchers, the Government or the public, the head teacher's judgment can be second-guessed by an appeal panel.

As I said, I always agree with my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards. He is absolutely right. The only difference is that, under this Government, the system will be independent whereas under the Tories it will be run by the LEAs. I leave it to people to reach a judgment on that.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Lansley *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then I shall make progress.

Chris Grayling: May I return the Secretary of State to the reality of what has happened? Eighteen months ago,

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her predecessor wrote to the head teacher of Glyn school after an appeal had been overturned and a pupil had been replaced in the school after exclusion. Her predecessor set out clearly in a letter a number of cases, including those involving violence and the threat of violence, in which a governing body had every right to exclude. However, when the governing body and head teacher of Glyn school put that statement to the test, the system failed them. The system is clearly wrong. The Secretary of State is making small political points, but when will she sort the problem out?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman is right. I shall read the words from the guidance that was issued to the appeal panels before the last election. It said:

"We would normally regard it as inappropriate to reinstate pupils where there has been serious or actual threatened violence to teachers or fellow pupils."

That is exactly why I made my statement last Thursday. I join the hon. Gentleman in saying—I say it again at the risk of again being accused of interfering—that I back teachers if they are threatened with violence or abuse by any pupil in their school. That should not happen. However, it should be equally clear that, in a natural system of justice in which appeal panels have power, I have no powers to overrule them. The hon. Member for Ashford is suggesting that, if the Tories were ever to return to government, they would take to Secretaries of State the right to overrule an independent appeal panel—in his case, the LEA. That is their policy, but I have described the only way to proceed.

The process is important and I want to explain my actions on the incident at the school. Whether there are appeals panels and whether they are independent or part of the local education authority, there is still a right in law to go to judicial review whether we like it or not. No hon. Member can change that—unless, of course, there is another policy announcement. In recent years, parents who have not got satisfaction at exclusion appeals hearings have gone to judicial review. No one is saying that that is not the case. If we get rid of appeals panels, which was Tory policy until today, people would seek to pursue the course of natural justice by questioning a decision in the courts. The quickest, most expedient, cheapest and most efficient way to deal with the natural right of a parent to ask for a double check to be made on a key decision is to go to an independent panel, and that is why we support them.

My right hon. Friend said in Prime Minister's questions that of all the decisions taken by heads, at the end of the day 3 per cent. are overturned. In some cases, such as last week's high-profile case, a decision comes to the public attention. Last week's decision was important. I do not detract from the need to have a national discussion about that because I welcome it. There is nothing wrong with the discussion that the nation had over the weekend. Indeed, it is about time that parents and everyone else in the community joined politicians and educationists in deciding what behaviour we accept from our children in schools. We should make that clear. I made my view clear last week and will continue to do so at every opportunity.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Surely the policy just announced by the Conservative spokesperson on education is even more incoherent when he mentions the local government ombudsman because the ombudsman's decisions have no force over local authorities. He cannot compel them to do anything.

Estelle Morris: That is absolutely right and people would probably end up in court. Perhaps I should not say this, but that process would take far longer than an exclusion panel.

Let me set out my involvement in the constituency of the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) last week. He wrote to me on 7 October, expressing his concern about the case. He had every right to do that. It is a letter that I would expect to receive from a Member of Parliament. It shows a proper process and reflects the fact that the hon. Gentleman expected the Secretary of State to take an interest, offer help and express an opinion. There was nothing to suggest that he did not want my interest in the case to be noted. By the time I heard about the letter on 10 October, someone had taken the case to the media and it had become the focus of national attention. That was the situation by the time I knew of the case and read the letter.

I am not criticising that—it was natural that the case should cause concern—but the media were already circling the school and trying to discover the identities of the parents and children, and people were giving interviews to the press. The idea that I would say, "Not me, guv. I have no powers and will not express an opinion," is wrong. That is not something that hon. Members will ever hear from this Secretary of State. The case deserved national attention and the nation was entitled to ask the Secretary of State's view.

I went further than that, as I would do in many circumstances, and not just those that relate to exclusions. I asked my officials to phone Surrey county council and ask whether we could help. I also wanted them to ask whether the process was as speedy as possible given the fact that the public eye was on the school and the boys. I mentioned that for two reasons: first, the school needed to get back to normal and there was a ballot for a teachers' strike the next day; secondly, and of equal importance, the boys' future needed to be settled because they had rights as well. They needed to get back to full time, good quality education.

That was the nature of my intervention, and it became very public last Thursday and over the weekend because the incident was in the spotlight, but quite honestly it is the bread and butter of my Department's work. It regularly responds to invitations, such as the one that I received from the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell, in whose constituency the school is situated, to do what it can. Sometimes, in fact quite often, we are asked to give money, while other requests are for us to change legislation or use our influence. On that occasion, we sought to use our influence.

Mr. Damian Green: The right hon. Lady rightly says that my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) wrote to her on 7 October, and she now tries to muddy the waters. I point out to her that on 10 October she found time to issue her press release and gain publicity, but she did not bother to reply to my hon. Friend until this morning, six days later.

Estelle Morris: I shall let the House into a state secret: I have a marvellous Department, but sometimes it does

not reach its targets for replying to letters. Six days exceeds every Whitehall target for replying to letters, and I am very pleased about that.

The hon. Gentleman should further consider the timing of the statements, which is an important point. One of our most important tasks is to get the standards agenda going and to achieve the desired progress in the education system. What we need to do most is back schools on discipline; collectively, we must make sure that we get that right. I made my statement at about four or five o'clock in the afternoon; I stand to be corrected about the precise time. By the time I made my statement the story had already been reported in the media, and rightly so—I make no criticism of that. It does not matter who gave the story to the media; it is a matter of natural national concern, and we acted completely appropriately.

Chris Grayling: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Estelle Morris: I will give way once more to the hon. Gentleman because the matter concerns his constituency, but I will not give way again after that.

Chris Grayling: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way to me a second time. We all share the aspiration of sorting out this matter, but may I just explain to her the problem that her intervention caused? By issuing to the media a statement that she had overruled the appeals panel, the Secretary of State raised expectations in the school that the problem had been solved, and 24 hours later those expectations were dashed when the school realised that she did not have the power to overrule. That is the problem that she caused locally.

Estelle Morris: If the hon. Gentleman reads the statement and listens carefully to the comments made that evening by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg), he will find that I made it quite clear that I had no powers. I knew that I had no powers and I had been through the matter that afternoon. Sometimes, however, one can just stand up and be counted, and that afternoon I stood up to be counted. I do not care two hoots that criticism followed; it was right for the Secretary of State to stand up and be counted and to use what influence I had. It was right for the Secretary of State to ring Surrey county council and say, "You know that we have no powers, but can we do anything to help? Could you move as quickly as possible to remedy the situation?"

I shall say no more about that because I am happy to be judged on my record, on my intervention and on my words, not only by teachers but by parents who want good standards of education and well disciplined schools.

I have taken far longer than I should have done—

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): What about A-levels?

Estelle Morris: I will talk about A-levels. Everybody who has got a grade this year should feel proud, and it is worth the paper that it is written on. It was absolutely deplorable, indeed shameful, of the Leader of the Opposition to say that the results are not worth the paper they are written on. I say once more that I have every confidence in yesterday's report by Mike Tomlinson. In addition, I know that all the organisations that brought the complaints to his attention have confidence in the report. I acted swiftly. I made sure that the inquiry was independent. I acted on every one of the recommendations, and I will act on the recommendations that come back from the second part of the inquiry.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Estelle Morris: I have been generous in giving way.

I want others to have the opportunity to address this subject. Everybody—at least those on the Labour Benches—looks forward to even more amazing policy announcements in the couple of hours ahead.

4.40 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): It would be easy to use this opportunity merely to throw insults at the Government for their handling of education policy without recognising as a starting point the huge problems that they inherited in 1997. I certainly want to go on record as saying that the Liberal Democrats recognise that there have been some improvements since 1997. The catalogue of improvements that the Secretary of State read out at the beginning of her speech was not due simply to Government policy. It was very much due to the hard work of our teachers, lecturers and everyone in the education world. The Government sometimes accept too much credit for what goes right and totally ignore things when they go wrong.

Although there was much with which I could agree in the opening speech of the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), the accusations had a hollow ring when one examined the alternatives presented by the Conservatives in Bournemouth and, indeed, today. In a half-hour speech, there was not a single positive proposal to resolve the issues that have been raised.

Phil Hope: I have been watching the hon. Gentleman discussing the issue of A-levels on various news programmes. While he is putting on record the views of Liberal Democrats, will he dissociate his party from the comments of the Leader of the Opposition, who described A-levels as not worth the paper that they were written on? Will he join us as we go to prize-giving evenings at schools to award the certificates to young people in congratulating them on their fantastic hard work?

Mr. Willis: I am enormously grateful to the hon. Gentleman for considering that very soon the Liberal Democrats will be the official Opposition. When we are, we shall not be repeating the outrageous slur made by the quiet man earlier today.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Willis: I would like to make a little progress.

[Mr. Willis]

What lies behind this debate is a deep-seated jealousy over the fact that the Labour Government are delivering Conservative policies. That is the truth of it. I ask Labour Members whether even a Thatcher Government would have dared propose such right-wing policies as creating a free market for higher education, breaking up the comprehensive system, introducing performance pay, stripping the last vestiges of power from local education authorities and handing them to private companies, privatising schools, privatising the Criminal Records Bureau and micro-managing our education service from Sanctuary house through a target-led agenda? That is a Thatcherite agenda that Thatcher herself could not introduce, and that is why the Tories are jealous. Labour Members are delivering the Tories' policies.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): While the hon. Gentleman is in the business of accusing the Government of being Thatcherite, perhaps he might explain why the Liberal Democrats seem to have gone rather socialist. Is it not a fact that the Liberal Democrats were reported in *The Times Educational Supplement* of 20 September as planning to do away with the curriculum for infant schools and to revert for those up to the age of seven to an educational policy dependent on learning through play? Is that not a reversion to the 1960s socialist policies that did so much damage to the education of our children?

Mr. Willis: It is worth coming into the Chamber just to hear the hon. Gentleman's intelligent and articulate interventions. I will send him the whole document, because it is crucial reading material on a serious issue. I strongly believe that we are moving away from quality early-years education by putting youngsters into formal education settings far too early. I make no apology for that view—it is something that I fervently believe. The hon. Gentleman should look at the experience in countries such as Denmark, Sweden or Holland, which have highly advanced early education services. He made a derisory comment about learning through play, but the fact is that all children learn though play. Had he spent a little more time playing as a child, he might have learned a little more.

The key accusation that the Liberal Democrats would lay at the Government's door is not one of inactivity, but one of paranoia. The Government need to control everything, to manage everything, to trust no one, to seek blind affirmation and to treat criticism with contempt—and, as we have seen today, above all never to accept responsibility when things go wrong. Imagine the outcry if local education authorities, not Capita, had failed to vet 7,000 teachers in time for the start of term. What would have happened—would the LEAs have got a £400 million contract extended? What if the further education sector, not Capita, had made a hash of individual learning accounts resulting in a multi-million pound fraud? Would the sector have received yet more lucrative contracts from the Government? Of course not; yet, in effect, that is what has happened with Capita. Both disasters could have been avoided if the Department for Education and Skills had prepared the contracts' specifications correctly and the Secretary of State had effectively monitored their delivery, but they did not, and that is a significant failure.

The current fiasco surrounding A-levels is yet another example of the Secretary of State behaving like Pontius Pilate when things go disastrously wrong. There were warnings as early as October 1998 that the new system of post-16 exams was deeply flawed. A 1998 internal report to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority that was sent to Ministers warned that unless the problems were sorted out, they would lead to massive grade inflation or grade fixing. Undeterred, the Government went ahead against all advice. There was chaos in the first year, with modules failing to appear, course materials failing to arrive in schools, and no markers to mark the modules. Our students were treated as little more than guinea pigs in a glorified experiment.

True to form, the Secretary of State stepped in in 2001—not to apologise or to accept that the situation was the result of her policy, but to take action to cut the number of modules. She said,

"the . . . reforms . . . did not do credit to anybody".—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 954.]

But they were the Secretary of State's reforms. What was left when the right hon. Lady had cut the number of modules students could take was a system simply for stacking up A-level points. That was the net result. It has thrown the lives of thousands of our students and their teachers and lecturers into confusion, and undermined confidence in the A-level system.

Let me make it clear to the Secretary of State and the House that the Liberal Democrats fully supported the introduction of AS-levels and A2s. We believed that it was right to broaden the curriculum at that time. Furthermore, we have not accused and will not accuse the Secretary of State or her Ministers of direct interference in the marking or grading process. Rather, we accuse her and her Department of creating a climate in which it was perceived that what was required was the avoidance of any accusation of grade inflation.

Mr. Lansley: Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the events of summer 2001, may I put it to him that he does the Secretary of State a slight injustice? The right hon. Lady is quoted on the BBC website as saying at the time

"All new exams take time to bed in, but the new AS has had more than its fair share of problems. I regret the extra stresses that have been put on students and their teachers."

There was at least an expression of regret. However, is it not more significant that the right hon. Lady said at that time—I quote the BBC's report of her remarks—that she was

"now determined to get the reforms right so that A levels could continue as 'a crucial benchmark of quality.'"

Having said that in July 2001, and considering it from the perspective of October 2002, it seems that the right hon. Lady took responsibility and is now trying to discharge it.

Mr. Willis: I apologise to the Secretary of State for not recognising that she did offer a mild apology at the end of 2001. However, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I believe that from the summer of 2001, when AS-levels went so badly wrong, there was paranoia—I use the word again—within the Department to ensure that grade inflation did not occur at the end of the year.

It was obvious that when students took a clutch of AS modules, they had the opportunity to resit them if they did not get good enough marks, and therefore get higher marks. They also had the opportunity to drop the modules at which they were not successful. It was obvious also that if 50 per cent. of the marks were to go on AS-levels, we would then have massive grade inflation. That was not because standards were dropped but because the kids followed the system and did better. That was the crux of the issue, and that was the system. It was nothing to do with the QCA or the examination boards. It was entirely the Secretary of State's responsibility. What has happened is the result of her refusing to accept any responsibility and simply passing the blame to the QCA. I think that it is shameful to use Mike Tomlinson's report as the basis for doing that and fundamentally wrong.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: No. I want to finish the point.

This year, there was a quinquennial review of the QCA's work. In June, the report highlighted the confusion of the relationship between Ministers and the authority. That was a central element of the report. In spite of that—this is an example of the incestuous nature of the relationship between the Secretary of State's Department and the authority—it argued for the status quo as it combines the "appearance" of independence while "retaining the ear" of Ministers. We cannot have that sort of contradiction and expect to have transparency. Equally, we cannot have a Secretary of State who then distances herself from an organisation that said, following a quinquennial review that reported to her, that it should have an "appearance" of independence while "retaining the ear" of Ministers.

The review went further. It dismissed any possibility of clarifying the relationship. Instead we are promised "a memorandum of understanding." If there is such a memorandum, we now know that it resulted in complete confusion. However, that is the proposal of the QCA in putting its house in order, together with the Secretary of State.

We know too that at the heart of the QCA since November 2000, the deputy chief executive and then the chief officer has been a serving senior civil servant seconded from the Department. She may not have been taking orders directly from the Secretary of State but surely she would have been able to convey the appropriate perceptions either to or from the right hon. Lady. I do not believe that a senior civil servant in the Department would be seconded elsewhere and would go to that new venue not knowing the policy of the Department and what it expected.

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman wrote to me about that last week, and I regret the fact that he has raised it in the House. It is totally inappropriate that civil servants should be attacked in that way, and one has just been attacked. I make it clear that it is a policy not only of my Department, but of the whole of Government, that senior civils are seconded both in and out of Government Departments. Officials in our Department are seconded not only to the QCA, but to Ofsted, the Teacher Training Agency, local authorities and many of our agencies. In that way they gain a better understanding of the needs of the education system. Equally, I have serving civil servants who are seconded from headship, from school advisership and from other Government agencies. I believe that every one of those civil servants carries loyalty to the organisation to which they are seconded and abides by the rules of that organisation. To imply that one of my senior civil servants was not able to do that, or may not have been able to do that, was shameful, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his remarks.

Mr. Willis: Methinks the Secretary of State protests too much. That is not what I said, and I do not think that hon. Members understood me to say that. What I am saying to the hon. Lady is that I do not believe that if I went from my headship, which I did on one occasion, and was seconded to another organisation—*[Interruption.]*—that is wishful thinking—I would not take with me the culture of that organisation. One naturally does that. That is not a slur on civil servants. It is an inevitable outcome of moving from one Department to another. While the Secretary of State is speaking of secondments, perhaps she would explain to the House why, when we cannot have the curriculum and staffing survey done, and when there are not enough senior civil servants to oversee contracts, 22 per cent. of the senior civil servants in the Department are seconded out of the Department. It is an amazing situation.

Mr. Andrew Turner: May I take the hon. Gentleman back to his comments about stacking up points? I remind him that the Secretary of State told me yesterday, when asked

"Is an AS-level half an A-level or not?" [*Official Report*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 218.]

that in some subjects the AS-level would be marginally easier than the A-level standard. That means that one can take six AS-levels, never taking a full A-level, and get the same number of UCAS points as if one had taken three A-levels and passed them at equivalent grades. If that is not devaluation, I do not know what is.

Mr. Willis: With due respect, that is an issue for the Secretary of State to answer. I know of no case where a student has stacked up six AS-levels in order to gain the qualification, but that is the logic of what the right hon. Lady said in reply to the hon. Gentleman's intervention yesterday, and it is up to her to respond.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Before the hon. Gentleman moves on, he spoke about the nature of the QCA and the fact that in the quinquennial review it was decided to leave it as it was, in order to retain the ear of the Secretary of State. If that is the case, does he not think it extremely odd that it did not come to the ears of the Secretary of State that all that pressure was being put on the exam boards?

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman could say that; I could not possibly do so, but that is the obvious conclusion. That is where, in this whole episode, we are left hanging in the air. The Secretary of State may feel that she is off the hook, but most people will have concluded otherwise.

[Mr. Willis]

The issue of standards was raised yesterday and the Secretary of State, who usually responds honestly and openly, did not do so on that occasion. It is important that she makes clear her policy on standards before Mike Tomlinson goes through the next part of his inquiry. He has to make recommendations for

"setting, maintaining and judging A-level standards".

Therefore it must be clear that where students achieve the standard set, they should be awarded the grade. The Secretary of State needs to make it clear in the House that it is the Government's policy that if a student achieves the necessary standard, they get the grade.

Estelle Morris: Of course.

Mr. Willis: That clearly was not what happened this year. If that was the case, we would not have looked at the work of 90,000 students and we would not have regraded nearly 2,000 students. If that is the case—I am glad that she said that it was—the Department for Education and Skills should not be put off by the annual wailings of Ruth Lea or successive Conservative Front Benchers, including the hon. Member for Ashford. On 13 August, even before this year's A-level results were published, he called for AS-levels to be scrapped and for an

"independent audit of exam quality".

He made that call before the results were even published, which is hardly a ringing endorsement for the 250,000 students who had taken their exams. Of course, we saw today the most deplorable example of the quiet man saying after all the anguish of the past two months that students now had certificates that were not worth the paper that they were written on.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): I applaud the Liberal Democrats' condemnation of Tory education policy, but I wish that they would pass it on to the Liberal Democrats on Cumbria county council, who are running the council in coalition with the Conservatives.

Mr. Willis: I do not know whether I am grateful for that intervention. I do not speak for Cumbria county council and it would be wrong of me to seek to do so.

Of course, the Government were right to broaden the post-16 curriculum. Indeed, it should be broadened even further, but if that is to be managed, far greater emphasis must be placed on internal assessment. To achieve that, as John Dunford, general secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, said yesterday in *The Guardian*, we need to establish credited chartered examiners. I hope that the Secretary of State will seriously consider that idea, which is not new. Teachers have already been doing similar work in music, drama, art and modern languages, but the proposal is one way of ensuring quality without making teaching the servant of an endless examination system. Alongside the abolition of league tables, the establishment of an independent QCA and the streamlining of the current examination boards into a single awarding body, such a proposal would do much to re-balance the emphasis in our schools towards teaching and learning, rather than testing and audit.

What would not help, however, is a sudden abandonment of the AS-level and A-level system after two years, as the Conservatives propose. Neither do we want the sudden lurch towards the international baccalaureate at which both the Secretary of State and her Minister for School Standards have hinted. Many schools, but especially FE and sixth form colleges, have invested very heavily in the new AS-level programme. Many colleges are already reporting a downturn in the number of applicants for AS-level courses. A sudden abandonment would cre[illegible]ge problems for the sector.

The Liberal Democrats hope that, in addition to the Tomlinson report, the Secretary of State will take a much more long-term view of the whole of the 14-to-19 curriculum and examination framework. Simply considering A-levels in isolation from the rest of the 14-to-19 framework would be a huge mistake. We have applauded many of the ideas in the Green Paper on 14 to 19-year-olds, but the sector needs a comprehensive framework of qualifications to underpin its success. It is increasingly clear that a one-size-fits-all examination system is inappropriate, especially when the vast majority of young people stay in full-time education or training until they are 19. Further tinkering as a response to political pressure is simply not acceptable. Now is the time to establish a royal commission to consider this whole vital area, take on board the views of industry, universities, colleges and the rest of the education world and produce a qualifications structure in which all sections of society can have confidence.

Chris Grayling: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, who seems to be contradicting himself. He said that we should not touch the AS-level and A-level system because our sixth formers need stability, but went on to say that we need to appoint a royal commission with a view to completely overhauling the examination system. What sort of message will that send to the sixth formers who are currently starting their courses?

Mr. Willis: The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), who usually makes intelligent interventions, may regret those comments. If he does not believe that there is a crisis of confidence in our examination system, he must have been elsewhere for the past two months. We are all united about the need for a new curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds. *[Interruption]*. The Liberal Democrats and the principal Opposition are certainly united.

If we are to introduce much more realistic vocational options, we must have an examination system that meets that aim. The Association of Colleges produced an interesting proposal for an overarching certificate. The Government have introduced the idea of a graduate certificate. We should examine the whole process to ensure the confidence of employers and the education world.

The debate has been interesting. Doubtless Members of all parties will ask questions about the competence of the Department for Education and Skills. However, what matters is what works for young people, adult learners, the community, and industry and commerce. A discredited system and a Department in which people have no confidence do none of us credit.

Let us consider higher education policy. Even before the review is published in November, the Minister is going around saying that we should have a market-led higher education system, that universities can go to the wall and merge without any discussion in the House. That discredits the Department and gives us the impression that the Secretary of State is not mistress in her house. The Minister for School Standards is looking for her job and the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education reports to the No. 10 policy unit. Unless we ask Mystic Meg for advice, we are clearly in a mess.

5.7 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats on education. He cares and is deeply knowledgeable about the system, unlike the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), the Tory spokesman. The latter epitomises the problems that the Conservative party is experiencing. He seemed to want to crawl around the minutiae of political debate with a loud hailer. One cannot communicate with the wider public in such a way.

Rob Marris: The quiet man.

Mr. Foster: I do not believe that he is a quiet man. It is right to have the debate, and it is right that the Tories tabled the motion and are attempting to hold the Government to account on education. However, they should recognise that they must have a little more vision and breadth of perspective to communicate with the voters, with whom they have failed to communicate.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the biggest problems for the Tories on education is that they do not believe that an A-level or any exam is worth passing unless many others have failed it? As the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) showed today, their message is that competition is the only way to achieve success and improve standards.

Mr. Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Innate elitism pervades much of the education system, not only the Conservative party. I entered politics to try to get rid of that, and many people from different parties are dedicated to such an objective.

One advantage of a long political memory is that, although I was not a Member of Parliament at the time, I remember reading about Tony Crosland and Edward Boyle, who were enormously respected by the education establishment. It was said of both of them, however, that their only function at that time was to hassle within the Cabinet and get a good Budget settlement, and that that was the end of their job.

The culture change that has occurred since those days is quite bewildering, not surprisingly, to many people, and not entirely welcome to everyone. It is welcome to me, except for the fact that the debate about centralism and localism is a perpetual one that will continue throughout the history of debates. From time to time, central Government become too centralist, and from time to time they devolve power to other bodies—local authorities, for example—only to discover that that is inadequate and that they have to claw back some power.

No one can doubt that education is the Government's top priority, not least because the Prime Minister has said as much so often, but it is so easy to say things. Why has he argued that it ought to be the top priority? He has done so partly because education is at the root of a strong economy. That is particularly relevant to my constituency, because we have always under-achieved according to all the measures of educational attainment. Far too few of our pupils have stayed on at school and gone to university; if we are to be a match for the fierce competitive world that is upon us—almost sweeping over us—we must attain far better levels of education and training.

Education is important not only because of the needs of a strong economy, but for reasons of social justice. That is one of the reasons that I came into politics almost 30 years ago. I had the advantage of a good education through the grammar school system, oddly enough, but the vast majority of my contemporaries—many of whom were just as bright as me—did not have that advantage, and were condemned for many years. Some of them never recovered, because of that system. I was determined that every child should have the same rights and opportunities as I had. That is what motivates the Prime Minister and everyone on the Labour Benches. I also concede that it has motivated many Conservatives over the years—for many of whom I have had enormous respect—and many Liberal Democrats. It is quite right that we should differ over how we should achieve that end, but that is our motivation, and a huge investment in education is absolutely crucial to achieving the objective of social justice.

I do not think that there can be any doubt about the huge investment that has been made by this Government since they took office in 1997, although some people may quibble about the statistics. I know that, for the first two years, we kept to the previous Tory Budget targets, but I was part of that decision so I have never complained about it, uncomfortable though it was during those two years. Since then, however, the investment in education has been enormous—I think that it has been unprecedented—and sustained. That is important in itself, but it is also important to understand that it has been possible only because of the economic competence of the Government.

I have been critical of the Government from time to time, as many right hon. and hon. Members know, but the economic achievement of getting low inflation, high employment and low unemployment at the same time, together with economic growth and the huge injection into all public services, is unprecedented in the Labour party's long history. It is also unprecedented in British politics. Until 1992, the Tories were thought to be the only party of economic competence, but Tory Governments never believed in or had the political will to make huge investments in public services. I can say with great confidence that such a configuration of achievements—low inflation, high employment, low unemployment and huge investment in public services—is pretty well unprecedented in the past 50, 60, or 75 years, or perhaps even longer than that.

[Mr. Foster]

We should celebrate the Labour Government's economic competence and the political will that enabled them to make this huge investment in education, without which most of the exchanges across the Chamber would be highly irrelevant. Without more money going into schools for revenue and for capital, many of the points of detail would be completely irrelevant. When I have visited schools, especially in the past 12 months, head teachers, members of boards of governors and teachers have told me—I do not have to ask them—that the money is making a difference. Everyone who believes in public services, as I do, knows that we cannot achieve change without money as a lubricant.

We have made the investment, but we must make it work. In the days of Tony Crosland and Edward Boyle, Governments did not accept that as an objective: it was sufficient that they provided the resources, and the system had to deliver what it could within those resources. The Government have had the courage to intervene to try to make the money work effectively. In so doing, they have come up against many vested interests, and have often made themselves deeply unpopular with teachers, head teachers, teachers' associations and members of the Labour party. That has also been unprecedented. The Tories would have loved to intervene to make schools more effective, but they did not know how to do so and they did not have the political courage to tackle that problem.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that the previous Conservative Government took a different route, which was to place trust in the professionals, and not to believe that everything can be done from Whitehall?

Mr. Foster: I am grateful for that intervention, because I have a long political memory of the 18 years when the hon. Gentleman's party was in power. Year after year, successive Tory Secretaries of State denigrated teachers and schools, and I longed for the time when we would have a Labour Government who would do what he says and trust the teachers.

Tony Cunningham: I was not going to intervene until I heard that comment from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). I taught for 17 years, including during the period of Conservative government between 1984 and 1994, and there is a stark contrast between then and now. Then, we had raffles to get money to buy exercise books, but now huge resources have been provided. I have talked to many head teachers in my constituency. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is excitement and a buzz about schools now? They want to do things and to change things. The situation has turned round completely.

Mr. Foster: I entirely agree. During all those Tory years, it was quite painful to listen to Members all the way down from Keith Joseph, for whom I had enormous respect in other contexts. From the Opposition Back Benches, I tried to convey to him that continually denigrating schools and teachers was not the way forward. That, however, was a lesson that the Conservatives could not learn. I do not recognise the picture painted by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner).

Tough decisions have been taken in an attempt to improve school performance. Many of us who had been involved in education knew that the head teacher was crucial—that without heads who inspired the confidence of staff, drove up standards and made everyone feel concerned about standards, schools were wasting their time. We all knew of heads who did not measure up to that; we all knew of teachers who should not be in the profession, and who were letting their colleagues down. No one before this Government, however, had the courage to deal with the problem. Carrying out that tough task and withstanding all the criticism that often came from their own side took enormous courage, and persistence and vision.

Driving up standards is not simple—there is no magic wand. Problems must be dealt from day to day in the classroom, and the teaching force must be galvanised. I accept some of the criticism of my party: I concede that our centralisation has now gone a bit too far. We must begin to trust teachers.

Chris Grayling: That is Conservative policy.

Mr. Foster: No, I have always believed that. I applaud what the Government have done in driving up standards and showing us the way, but now that all that courageous work has been done we have an opportunity to look to teachers to show us new and exciting ways of doing their job better. I hope—indeed, I believe—that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her colleagues will take that unique opportunity. We needed intervention to show that those whom we represent would not accept excuses for low standards in, for instance, inner-city schools. It was important to put that across, and it was not done without causing some pain and suffering to all involved. Now, however, we have a golden opportunity to allow teachers to show us what can be done—the delivery of standards in the hands of teachers, including head teachers; politicians cannot achieve it.

It is right for people to crawl over the minutiae of who said what to whom, when and with what motive, but it was regrettable that during yesterday's exchanges the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) seemed to be trying to get away with alleging that there had been political interference. Today, he backed off, and I am glad that he did so, because what he said yesterday did him no credit. I was going to urge the quiet man to have a quiet word with him; perhaps that has happened in the meantime.

I think that the Conservatives have failed two important tests. First, have they the economic competence to deliver the objectives that this Government have achieved? Since 1992, no one has believed that they have. In fact, many in the Conservative party do not believe it either.

Secondly, if the Conservatives had that economic competence, would they have the political will, or even the desire, to make the investments in education that the Labour party has made, or would they prefer some other course of political action? In my book, they fail both those tests.

5.25 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I had not intended to get into the wider debate but simply wanted to concentrate on the A-levels fiasco and its effect in my constituency. However, the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) was unfair to Edward Boyle and to Tony Crosland. As I recall, although it was a long time ago, Edward Boyle was the Secretary of State who introduced polytechnics, and Tony Crosland—who worked in the white heat of the technological revolution—did a great deal to improve technical education; certainly the Labour party always said so.

Looking back, some bad things were done by the Labour party, but there were some good things. The same is true of my party. During the 18 years of Conservative rule, the national curriculum and league tables were introduced, through which we discovered what needed to be done in our inner-city schools. City technology colleges brought hope to areas where there was none before. Specialist schools, on which the Government have built, are a Conservative idea. We should not be too churlish about one another.

Turning to the A-levels fiasco, the alarm bells were rung first at the Knights Templar school in my constituency. Articles in the media described the plight of students such as Laura Wheen, who obtained A grades in psychology A-level while receiving a U for her coursework, as did the whole class. That is extraordinary; that excellent class had received excellent AS results, and good grades were predicted for it. The teacher had read the coursework and was impressed by it, but the class received these extraordinary results.

The same was true in history. Louis Gearing, a gifted history student, needed a particular result to get into Oxford, but he did not get it because his coursework was marked down to U. It seems odd that a bright student, who received two As in other subjects and A grades in part of his history course in the exams, should suddenly get a U for his coursework. I am pleased that Louis Gearing has been regraded. His grade has gone up and he is now able to go to Oxford, although he has put it back until next year. I am glad that that was possible as a result of the regrading exercise, but some questions remain.

The set of Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations psychology results that was not reviewed—the grade boundaries have not been changed—seems very odd. How was it that, at the Knights Templar school, these excellent students were able to get A grades in some of the examinations in psychology, yet were all getting U, a fail, in their coursework? No one has explained that. It was not explained by Mike Tomlinson, and I would like an explanation from Ministers.How does an A-grade student suddenly become a failure when it comes to the coursework? That seems extraordinary. One might understand if it were the other way round. Someone might help a student with the coursework and the student might struggle through.

Mr. Willis: That is usually the criticism that is made of coursework.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman is right. How can it happen the other way round? It does not make sense. Labour Members might think that it was down to the teacher, who may have read the coursework and been over-optimistic. She may not have understood and it was all a terrible accident. However, I checked with other schools in my constituency, including Fearnhill in Letchworth, another good school. The head there, Lynne Monck, wrote to me to say:

"Students who had received A or B grades for most psychology modules—

this relates to the OCR again—

"were awarded U grades for coursework.

The coursework of some candidates awarded a U grade was judged to be A grade standard by the subject teacher who had attended the support meeting and followed the guidelines."

Now, two teachers are getting it wrong—looking at course work, seeing that it is really quite good, and being surprised when it is failed. As we have heard through the media, that is being repeated around the country.

I want to know from the Minister why OCR psychology A-level has not been subject to a review of the grading boundaries. How could this have happened? The Minister might want to consider the following point, which is also suspicious. When Fearnhill requested a re-marking of the results, they came back the same. It also asked for the scripts—the coursework papers—to be returned. *[Interruption.]* I should be grateful if the Minister would listen to this. Fearnhill was told that the papers could not be sent back, even though they should be available under the guidelines. The same is true of Knights Templar, which was told in August—when it originally raised the matter—that it would be sent photocopies of the scripts and coursework papers.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heald: In a minute. Knights Templar was promised the papers, yet they never came. It filled in the forms, which stated that it could have the scripts if it wanted them. In a letter to me, Knights Templar said:

"We asked for a re-mark of our candidates' 2543 Research Reports (Psychology) and 2549 Psychology and Crime. We also asked for the scripts. We received letters giving the outcome of the results enquiry this morning"—

7 October—

"but without the scripts. Oddly, these letters all stated, 'Script Copy: Not Requested'. Having checked his records and finding that he had indeed ticked 'Copy of Scripts' on the form",

the head of the sixth form who deals with these matters

"rang OCR to ask why the scripts had not been returned. The initial response was that scripts in certain subjects were not being returned. After persisting, he was then told that exceptions could only be made in special circumstances. Eventually, the person from OCR decided that ours was an exceptional circumstance and agreed to send the scripts."

However, they have not arrived.

The question remains as to how A-grade students who were awarded U grades in these psychology papers were awarded A grades for other papers in the same subject. That seems extraordinary. The grade boundaries in psychology were not reviewed, although it was said that they would be. Why not? Why is OCR so reluctant to return the psychology coursework and scripts?

[Mr. Heald]

Andrew Wheen, father of Laura and a constituent of mine, says that the way to address the issue is

"to select a sample of candidates with anomalous grade combinations"—

in other words, the candidates who got As and Us—

"and to review all their examination scripts and coursework"

in close detail. That need not be a massive exercise; it need only be a sample.

The Minister has a duty to get to the bottom of what went on. It is not right to leave students failing to understand why they ended up with the marks that they did.

John Mann: The hon. Gentleman's thoughtful contribution is in contrast to others from those on the Opposition Benches. We owe a debt of gratitude to Peter Chapman, the head teacher of Knights Templar school, for being the first to raise this issue. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with Peter Chapman, who said during the Radio 4 interview in which he first raised this issue publicly that he regarded the Secretary of State as a woman of great integrity, and as an exemplary Secretary of State? Does he also agree with Peter Chapman's comments at a parents' evening at Knights Templar school—my wife was a governor at the time—in 2001? He said that, before casting their vote at the general election, parents should remember the difference in funding under a Labour Government and a Labour Secretary of State between 1997 and 2001, and funding before 1997—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is rather long.

Mr. Heald: I enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's speech, and I was almost tempted to ask him to give way. He and I know Peter Chapman, and he may remember that I was giving the prizes at that prize day. In my speech, I said that life was not a dress rehearsal. If a student has a question mark over an exam result and does not understand why a particular result was obtained, that can be really devastating. Laura Wheen wanted to go to one university but is having to go to another, and that is devastating. For two months Louis Gearing thought that he was not going to Oxford, which was his life's ambition. He is going to Oxford now, but he thought that he would lose the opportunity. It is important that students be given proper respect.

I have never challenged the Secretary of State's integrity. Peter Chapman was grateful for some school buildings put up that very year, thanks to a combination of the Government and the Hertfordshire county council, which is an excellent, and Conservative-controlled, education authority.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): And thanks to a good MP.

Mr. Heald: I lobbied for the building, yet the important question is not about whether any Secretary of State is pleasant or a person of integrity but about whether pupils and students have been affected. For the individuals whom I have mentioned, these are desperate stories, and we have not yet got to the bottom of what happened.

Another case that I want to outline is not one of the OCR cases. It involves Edward Browning, another Knights Templar student who was doing Edexcel A-level music. He gave a live performance for his grade 8, which he gained with a distinction, and he gave the same performance for his A-level two weeks later. The guidance for A-level unit 4 states that a pupil who achieves grade 6 would attain a top mark in that unit.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) probably also knows Simon Marlowe, the accompanist on that occasion and a professional pianist. He has told me that Edward Browning's second performance for A-level was even better than the first performance, for grade 8, for which he was awarded a distinction. However, he was awarded only 10 out of 90 for that second performance.

It is extraordinary to note that, when Edward appealed, the mark was raised to 59 out of 90. How can it happen that an original mark of 10 out of 90 can be raised on appeal to 59 out of 90? The curious thing is that he was awarded almost 100 per cent. at his grade 8 exam.

Ministers should not think that the problem with what is happening with A-levels is over. They need to audit what is happening much more carefully.

Laura Wheen and her family are unhappy about the letter that the Minister for School Standards wrote to me in response to these matters. They did not object only to the fact that the letter was the classic civil service response, that it said that the Tomlinson report would take effect and that the matter was nothing to do with the Government. They are unhappy that the letter spoke about what would happen were Laura still unhappy with "his" grade after the revision process. That is not good enough.

The Government often say that the problem is all to do with schools and hospitals. They did so again at the Labour party conference, but that is not the case. The problem is to do with pupils in education, and patients in health. The Government have many plans, grand schemes, projects and initiatives, but they must remember that someone like Laura Wheen is entitled to know why she was not given the grade in the OCR psychology A-level that everyone expected her to obtain.

5.39 pm

Liz Blackman (Erewash): I came into politics after spending most of my previous life in teaching. I took that road because I was so frustrated by the lack of policies and resources at the front line for the education of pupils. I looked with great interest to the Labour Government to bring in the right policies and the resources to implement them. By all accepted measures, educational achievement has been raised since 1997. I note the miserly acknowledgement of that from the Opposition education spokesman, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). We have made dramatic improvements in achievement in all key stages since 1997. I shall return to key stage 2 later.

We also ensured that inclusion was at the forefront of early years provision and that access for adult learners was a success story. That calls for celebration. Indeed, I

have joined in the celebration of those achievements in many secondary schools in my constituency. It is lamentable that the motion tabled by the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrat amendment made no mention of those achievements. Of course, if they had done so they would have had to recognise the Government's success and input.

Whenever politicians try to analyse and assess the impact of policies they should look to their own backyard—the constituencies that they represent. In Erewash, the improvements both in pupil performance and tangible resources have been extremely visible. We have a sure start programme for the early years. We have new teachers and teaching assistants and new classrooms. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned, Ofsted said that the current generation of teachers was the best ever. I pay tribute to teachers in my constituency and beyond.

The improvement in the quality of head teachers has also been much more evident in my constituency. The quality of newly appointed heads is undeniable and it filters down into the performance of their school.

We have seen new classrooms, new roofs and refurbishment although, lamentably, with small security fences. There are two new schools on the block, one funded by the private finance initiative and the other via the public funding route. I welcome that.

Managing improvement is always challenging, however; there is always a job to be done. It is an evolving process. Those who are managing policy constantly need to innovate or supplement to solve the challenges. Key stage 2 is an example of that. My right hon. Friend mentioned the need constantly to re-evaluate. That is not to deny, however, that in the round key stage 2 has not been a success when we compare performance between 1997 and the present.

Since 1997, there has been a 10 per cent. improvement in English and a 14 per cent. improvement in maths. The literacy and numeracy strategies have played an enormous part in ensuring higher performances from pupils. However, that is not to say that we have not reached a plateau, as my right hon. Friend acknowledged.

The Tories ask why we have targets if we do not meet them. I argue that it is right to have targets and, when we do not quite reach them, to acknowledge it, as long as we are travelling in the right direction. We need targets to raise expectations; to set policies; to target resources; and to analyse what is happening. After that analysis, the professional course is to further the policies by setting new targets and refocusing existing policies to ensure that the missing aspects are put in place.

Chris Grayling: Given the fact that teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate—one in seven each year—and that the exam system is clearly in chaos, as well as the obvious disciplinary problems in too many of our schools, will the hon. Lady say exactly what she has in mind when she uses the word "refocusing"?

Liz Blackman: I was about to come on to that. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, teachers are moving into the profession at an extremely rapid rate and we have never had a better qualified and more professional group of teachers, as acknowledged by Ofsted. I will move on to discipline because the issue needs airing, but I should like to finish what I was saying about key stage 2.

One of the issues with key stage 2 is related to the differential between boys and girls, which partly relates to the way boys are socialised and partly to the way males and females develop their linguistic skills. That issue has been around for a long time, but we are at least beginning to tackle it. Support packages are now going into schools and catch-up programmes are being rolled out nationally for all year 5 pupils, which is absolutely right. So further literacy support is being given. The intention is to give further support to schools that do not perform as well as others that operate in similar catchment areas, to ensure that their pupils catch up by having access to the same quality of education as their peers in similar schools.

The Government cannot be complacent, as the Secretary of State has clearly signalled this afternoon, but progress never follows an even, upward line. There are blockages in the system. For me, the issue involves recognising those blockages and finding ways to solve them, not sweeping them under the carpet and saying that we have not got a problem.

When I was considering speaking about key stage 2 in this debate, a press release arrived on my desk, and I shall quote it to rebalance the picture slightly:

"National test result for 11-year-olds have just been published by the Government and Derbyshire pupils have outperformed schools across the East Midlands and the rest of the country."

As I represent a Derbyshire constituency, I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate my local LEA.

Moving on to behaviour and exclusion, yes, there is a challenge in our schools—a challenge that a few pupils pose to teachers because of their unacceptable behaviour. I have always maintained that good teaching can eliminate poor behaviour from 90 per cent. of pupils. That quality of teaching draws pupils into a more positive attitude, works with them and moves them on to success. That is why we must continue to strive to improve the quality of teaching. I acknowledge that the quality of teaching is rising, as does the chief inspector of schools, but there is no doubt that children on the fringe of bad behaviour will not stray if they are given the right sort of high quality teaching.

That said, some children in our schools will demonstrate challenging and disturbed behaviour for whatever reason, and no matter how many strategies are tried, schools simply cannot move those children towards behaving acceptably. That damages everyone—the pupils themselves, the pupil cohort, the teachers and the reputation of the schools. That issue has to be addressed, but the question is how to do so.

There has been a lot of discussion this afternoon about the issue of the structure for permanent exclusion. In the first instance, it is the head's responsibility, and, in the second instance, it is the responsibility of the independent appeals panel. I agree with Chris Patten's justification for setting up the appeals panel in 1986, which was quoted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—parents must have an independent place to go to challenge a decision. That is an issue of natural justice, as he mentioned, and is related to the Human Rights Acts. There is also a place for the Secretary of State to comment on a decision that I, too, believe was

[Liz Blackman]

profoundly wrong, as the guidance was not followed by the independent appeals panel. The structure and mechanisms of the system, however, have served us quite well since being set up in 1986. As has been flagged up, the guidance needs to be tougher and stronger and needs to make it extremely clear that the issue relates to the impact of such pupils on the school community. I therefore welcome the fact that one of the members of the independent appeals panel will be someone who has had direct experience in the classroom, which is essential.

I wanted to move on to the issue of the Conservative party's stance on this matter, but I must confess that I completely lost track of what the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was proposing this afternoon when he was making policy on the hoof. I had understood that the Conservatives' official policy was that there should be legal home-school contracts, which I think is a barmy idea—it is extremely bureaucratic, and there would be many legal challenges and resource implications for the school. It would be a plate of spaghetti—a complete nightmare. It is therefore far better to toughen up the present system, which has served us quite well, than to follow that route, which would be a knee-jerk reaction.

Before I finish on the issue of exclusions, we should also recognise the importance of dealing with and acknowledging the rights of children who are permanently excluded. I recall from my teaching days that there was nothing for them—it was very difficult to get them into other schools if they were very challenging, and they entered what I call the twilight zone. They never touched base with any educator whatever. They got into trouble and began to get involved in petty crime. There was nothing for them—not even a safety net. I praise the Government's commitment to and delivery of full-time education for those children, for all sorts of reasons, but mostly because their behaviour is not irreversible at that stage in their lives if we do not walk away from them, which the previous Government did and this Government have not done. I note the comment by the Office for Standards in Education that the education standards of permanently excluded pupils have sharply improved, which is absolutely right.

Truancy is part of the problem, and good teaching minimises it, but there are other reasons for truancy, not least parents condoning it. A multi-agency approach is important in that regard. It is important that parents are supported and that there are police on the streets who are part of the solution in terms of identifying truants. That is where community beat teams, which have been doing sterling work in my community, fit in. Ultimately, however, it is important to recognise that parents, too, have a responsibility. When they are not discharging their responsibility and not accepting the support for that responsibility, they should be challenged, and we should make greater use of parenting orders and fines.

Rob Marris: Would my hon. Friend agree that, by way of analogy—this is an Opposition day debate, and I can see only five Conservative Members in the Chamber—the Conservatives are playing truant and their quiet man is not taking responsibility in leading them either?

Liz Blackman: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's point. The Chamber has indeed become rather sparsely populated.

I want to move on to other issues. I want to flag up another particularly good policy, which, again, relates to discipline, truancy and school performance—the idea of federations of schools and of taking good leaders who have a track record of turning schools around and making their talents available to others. We should take that forward swiftly. On the day that policy was announced, a head from Sheffield, I think, was wheeled out by Radio 4 to comment on it. He had turned around the culture in several schools that were now performing well. We need to encourage more good leaders to come into schools as heads, but at the same time, we need to use the people with the track record and the expertise who are already there.

I have concentrated on discipline, achievement and behaviour, but those are bread-and-butter issues. I am really disappointed that the Conservatives have virtually nothing positive to say about how they would move the agenda forward and raise achievement. I am equally disappointed that the Liberal Democrats have come forward with very little. We have the commitment and the track record in terms of pupil performance, but what really heartens me is that, when we have got it wrong, we have the honesty to say that we have got it wrong. It is not easy to move forward. When there are problems, we tackle them, and we say that there are problems. We consult and we try again to move the agenda forward. That is important. We are an open Government in that respect. By listening, and by recognising the issues, we have achieved a great deal in the last five years.

5.57 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I shall try to keep my remarks relatively brief, as I know that other Members want to speak.

The House will not be surprised to learn that my biggest concern in relation to this debate is the situation surrounding the school in my constituency; however, I also want to make several points about the predicament that many of the other head teachers in my area and around the country face in trying to maintain the improvements that have taken place under governments of both parties in the past 15 years.

It is important to remember that recent international surveys of educational performance in different countries—the most recent of which was carried out by the OECD a couple of years ago—highlighted the high quality of the education that our 15-year-olds receive. Those 15-year-olds have been educated under Conservative and Labour Governments. The reality is that, over that 15-year period, good work has been done across the political spectrum to raise standards, given that in the preceding era, teaching strategies in this country were broadly speaking not as good as they should have been.

The tragic thing today is that we risk losing many of the improvements that have taken place over that 15-year period. Ultimately, we risk losing them because the teaching profession is becoming demoralised and teachers are leaving their jobs. Good heads and good

teachers are leaving, for a variety of reasons. At the heart of those reasons—this is backed up by specific research concerning those leaving the profession—is the issue of discipline. Sadly, although the vast majority of our young people are a credit to us—they work hard, achieve excellent exam results and go on to do an excellent job in our society—a minority continues to cause trouble in our schools. That minority continues to disrupt otherwise hard-working classes and to set an example to its peers that we would not wish to be set. We should have a system that backs up heads and teachers when they take difficult decisions about that troublesome minority. As we have seen in my constituency in the past few weeks, the tragedy is that such a system does not exist.

I feel very much for the predicament that the governors and teachers of Glyn school have faced. This is not the first time that they have had to face such a problem. Eighteen months ago, they decided to exclude a boy who was caught with drugs in the school. That decision was overturned by an appeal panel and it caused great distress in the school, not because of the principle of the individual case but because of the signal that it sent to every other pupil that they could get away with it. There is no ultimate sanction if pupils who are excluded can go to an appeal panel and be placed back in the same classroom with the same teachers who tried to discipline them in the first place. What message does that send to anyone tempted to cause trouble in future?

One can imagine the great distress caused to the head of the school, his governing body and the teaching staff when the same thing happened again 18 months later. The circumstances may have been different but, as outlined specifically in a letter from the Secretary of State, they were such that the decision to exclude should have had a rock-solid foundation. There should have been no doubt at all. There had been a clear indication from the Government that, this time, in taking a decision to exclude, the school and its governing body was right. One can imagine their distress when the decision was overturned and they were instructed to take the boys back into the school.

We have seen the rest of the story unfold in the media in the past few days. It is very much my hope that the media attention will die down and that the school, the LEA and the parents of the boys can sort the matter out. The school will then be able to return to normal. The boys will be able to continue their education, which they must have, in a different place, perhaps separated from each other, but in an environment in which they can be sorted out and placed on to the straight and narrow and achieve their potential without a further signal being sent to pupils in that and other schools that they can get away with such behaviour.

Fundamentally, however, we will still be left with a system that is flawed. The Prime Minister said this afternoon that only 3 per cent. of exclusions were overturned by appeals panels, but one third of appeals involve pupils being returned to schools from which they have been excluded. In one third of exclusion cases, a message is sent to the rest of the boys and girls in those schools that they can get away with bad behaviour. That is wrong. It is right and proper that every case is considered carefully, and I do not believe that any head teacher or governing body takes lightly the decision to exclude. I must correct the hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman), who said that the decision is taken first by the head and then by the appeal panel. It is not. We have governing bodies that represent local authorities, teaching and non-teaching staff and other people in the community; who better to be the ultimate arbiter of whether a head teacher's decision is correct?

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I take the hon. Gentleman's point about the media taking a lower profile in this case, but it is one case, and most appeal panels do not overturn the decision taken by a school. Did the hon. Gentleman have anything to do with leaking the story to the press in the first place?

Chris Grayling: I did not leak anything to the press. I have been totally open in raising my concerns locally and nationally. I wrote to the Secretary of State at the very start to say that there was a concern that needed to be sorted out. The hon. Lady does my constituents discredit if she does not recognise the angst in my constituency and in the whole area about what has happened and if she does not realise the extent of the debate that has taken place locally. It does not take anyone to leak a story like that to the media: it gathered momentum from the beginning, because of the genuine frustration that exists.

We must have a system that reflects the needs of schools, head teachers and governing bodies to maintain discipline. The Government must come up with a viable alternative, and I urge them to so because the need exists today.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Having been the chair of governors of a secondary school for 12 years, I sympathise with the school governors in this case. This afternoon, the Leader of the Opposition called for the abolition of the appeal panels, but the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the Government should come up with a new system: When will we hear the hon. Gentleman's or the Conservative party's solution to the problem?

Chris Grayling: There is no difference. I fundamentally believe, as does the Conservative party, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green)—he set this out at our party conference—that the ultimate decision must rest with the governing body. The governing body and the community that it represents must be the final arbiter.

Let us consider the consequences of getting things wrong. *[Interruption.]* It is all well and good Labour Members trying to score points across the Floor of the House. They do not seem to understand the importance of this issue. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for School Standards may chuckle, but does he not realise the strength of feeling in the teaching profession? Does he not talk to those head teachers who strongly believe that the current system is letting them down? Does he not read the surveys of teachers leaving the profession? As I said, in the last year for which we have figures available, 15.8 per cent. of teachers resigned from the profession. Some 85.2 per cent. referred to getting out of teaching and some 45 per cent. referred to pupil behaviour as a key reason for their decision to leave. Has the Minister really not understood the importance of this issue? Can

[Chris Grayling]

he not get to grips with it and give head teachers a framework within which they can work that is fair and just and protects the interests of their schools?

Rob Marris: Labour Members are a little confused about the system that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) described earlier, in which LEAs would have a role in the appeals system. That is in contradistinction to the system that we have now. Will the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) therefore explain how that would have worked in the case of the two pupils at Glyn technology school?

Chris Grayling: I did not come here to engage in a prolonged discussion about Conservative policy. I want action from the Ministers who have the job today and whose responsibility it is to sort out problems such as those experienced in my constituency. They have not done and are not doing enough. I hope that they will soon do enough to ensure that such a case cannot recur.

This case is only one problem. We have also had the A-level fiasco, and Epsom college in my constituency was one of the schools caught up in that. The Government also appear actively to encourage higher education institutions to accept pupils with lower attainments than those achieved by pupils in other schools. I highlight the case of a young lady from Epsom college who achieved very good A-level results but who was turned down for a place at a university that had offered places to pupils with significantly lower attainments. That cannot be right. We will not help to achieve excellence in society if we force down the achievements of those at the top of the pile so as to promote those who need help but who should not be pushed to the top for no good reason.

If the problems are not solved and if the Government cannot deliver a fairer framework and provide better practical support to heads and teachers, they will leave the profession. The plateau that we have mentioned today will be there tomorrow, the day after, the year after and the year after that. It is all well and good Labour Members citing all the so-called achievements of the past five years, but if they talk to teachers and head teachers, they will find that there is a crisis of credibility in the current system. If the Government do not address that crisis and provide the real solutions that keep the best and most experienced teachers in the profession, the improvements that have taken place in recent years under all Governments will not be able to continue.

6.9 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): In the summer I spent a weekend at a game park in a faraway land. When a person visits a game park, he hopes to see the kill and have a sense of blood. As a new MP I have been waiting for the lions to devour the carcase of the downed Front Bencher. Unfortunately, I have been disappointed. The other part of the equation in a game park is the heat of the midday sun when mad dogs and Englishmen go out. That is when the jackal appears. It runs around but does not make a kill. Instead, it scavenges for berries and insects. There are a lot of jackals here today, desperately looking around for the odd—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interesting though the hon. Gentleman's contribution may be, he should address his remarks to the motion.

John Mann: In that case I shall talk about the coalfields.

For the past 80 years in my constituency, the education world—

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman took us on a tour of Africa and now we are off to the coalfields. Surely the subject of the debate is education.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is correct. I have already reminded the hon. Gentleman to address his remarks to that topic.

John Mann: On coalfields and education, for the past 80 years, mining villages—now mainly former mining villages—in my constituency have not been well served by successive Governments when it comes to education. For decade on decade, the grammar school debate has had little relevance to them, other than in relation to secondary moderns, which the overwhelming majority of children from pit villages attended. During that period the children in schools in my constituency were described as pit fodder because on the Friday on which they were leaving school at the age of 15—eventually it became 16—the National Coal Board turned up and told them which pit they were working in on the Monday. Whether they liked it or not, they went into the pit.

The legacy of that is twofold. In our surgeries we see the level of illiteracy among the older population. Scores of retired miners who come to see me with compensation claims for industrial injuries caused by working down the pit cannot read or write. They bring the wife, the son or the daughter with them because, although they will not admit it, they cannot fill in the forms to get the compensation themselves. That is the norm rather than the exception.

However, the problem of lack of aspiration is even more terrifying. I spent most of September holding a public inquiry into heroin use in coalfield communities. Until the pits shut, those communities had a cohesion and a discipline that held them together. To put it crudely, problems of discipline were sorted out beneath the ground. The pits are not open now but the communities still exist and, since the decimation of the pits in the 1980s and early 1990s, they have struggled to cope. The level of heroin addiction among younger people from those villages in my constituency leaves me incredulous. Some of them started using drugs in the early 1990s at the age of nine, 10 or 11. Five of them died this year. The one permanent institution is the school. I am not prepared to tolerate for those children —from this or any other Government—anything less than I expect for my children.

My children go to and have gone to local state schools. That is my experience of education today. I can see improvements year on year, as can the majority of

hon. Members, especially Labour Members. In addition to the results and the figures, we can witness the improvement. We can feel it and understand the difference today. I go to schools all the time. I take classes in secondary schools and talk to primary schools constantly, as I am sure do most of my colleagues. We find that teachers, head teachers and governors no longer have the problem of resources.

Let me give an example. Since Labour came to power, there have been 10 exclusions from Bircotes school in one of the big pit villages. The head teacher excluded pupils because he wanted to turn that failing school into one in which the community could take pride. He told me that the biggest difference was the £300,000 that was spent on the flat roof. The advantage of that was more fundamental than the saving in recurrent maintenance costs, which was substantial and detracted from other uses for the money; it also meant that his time as a head teacher could be used differently. Should his time be spent patching up 30-year-old flat roofs that should never have been built like that in the first place, or should it be spent on building standards in schools? That is the big difference.

Let me also give the example of New Manton primary school, which used to be called Manton primary school, and tell the House something about exclusions. The Government have made a bigger difference to primary schools than to anything else. The late Matthew Wilson—he died earlier this year when he was 19 years old—was in the headlines when he was five or six because the teachers went on strike when the governors would not exclude him. That school excluded someone three weeks ago.

The school is called New Manton because £1 million has been spent on it in the past six months. It has been rebuilt. That is the sort of change that we need if we are to raise aspirations among those children. For 80 years they have been told their place in society. They have been told where to go, and it did not matter whether it was a secondary modern or a comprehensive. They have been told where they would be for the rest of their lives. That does not create aspiration. When the jobs and the job security go, a time bomb ticks away that encourages a lifestyle of truancy, absenteeism and experimentation with drugs, especially heroin. I assure Ministers that when I publish our report on Monday, I will deliver a copy to the Department for Education and Skills. It makes four recommendations on the national curriculum and on how we create aspiration in schools in such communities.

The debate should be about how we further that process and extend to other schools the gains made at Knights Templar school, which my eldest daughter attended until the election. We need to translate the successes at brilliant schools to schools that are slowly beginning to be successful so that that success is replicated in every corner of the country. I congratulate the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) on a considered and relevant speech, but to people living in my constituency—and to those who went before them—it is a disgrace to hear the nonsense and rubbish that we have heard from the jackals at play.

6.19 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): It is a little odd that on this Conservative Opposition day so few Conservative Members have been here.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is the only Liberal here.

Mr. Rendel: Indeed I am, but this is not a Liberal Democrat Opposition day. It is perhaps significant that the Leader of the Opposition today made a remark that some Conservative Members may be embarrassed about.

Earlier, a Conservative Member criticised comprehensives. I should like to start on a note of personal gratitude to the state school system. The last of my three children has just left school. All my children were educated entirely in the state system, and they got a great deal out of it. I know that many of their colleagues and friends also had a very good education in the state system. As people tell me is unmistakeable from my accent, and as you can probably tell, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not a product of the state system. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) never ceases to remind me of that fact whenever I speak in the House. Nevertheless, I feel, for a number of reasons, that my children have had a much better education than most children who go through the independent system now. They have emerged with a lot more knowledge of the world and a better understanding of how normal people live. They have certainly had excellent teaching throughout their school careers.

I realise that that is not true of the state system in every part of the country. It happens that in my part of the world, west Berkshire, we have an excellent state system. I would have been happy to send my children to any of the schools in west Berkshire, and I am delighted that our system is so good.

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: I apologise to hon. Members but I have been asked to keep my speech short, so I have said that I will take no interventions. I am not trying to be rude; I know that a number of other Members want to speak, so I must do without interventions today.

There are undoubtedly problems in the state system, some of which have been highlighted today. I turn first to the A-levels fiasco. I certainly do not agree with the phrase used by the Leader of the Opposition earlier today when he said that this year's A-levels are not worth the paper that they were written on. I regard that as an appalling slur on the students who have taken A-levels and, in many cases, gained grades that are fully justified and of which they can be proud. They will feel that those grades have been denigned by the right hon. Gentleman's remark. It is interesting that when the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was challenged to confirm that he agreed with his leader, he failed to do so. Indeed, he refused to do so and seemed rather embarrassed by the remark. Perhaps he wishes that the quiet man of politics had been a bit quieter or shut up altogether.

[Mr. Rendel]

The remarks of the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) were very interesting, and I am pleased to see that he is still here. His remarks were to the point, and he asked a series of questions to which I hope the Minister will properly respond. The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire is not the only one who has come across cases of the sort that he mentioned. Obviously, because I have children who have friends in different schools around the country, I have heard of various cases in which young people have had A-level papers marked with very different grades, in spite of the fact they have the same level of intelligence and received the same teaching.

That is inexplicable, particularly when, as happened in at least one case that I know of but not in the case mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, the papers were returned and the teachers confirmed that it was extraordinary that one paper should have been marked with a U when the others received a much higher grade. There seemed to be no difference in the standard of the papers. Either the paper had been completely mis-marked or there had been a misunderstanding about what was required. I suspect that the Government will tell us that the teachers and pupils in such cases simply did not understand what was required in particular A2 papers this year. If so, surely the Government should be criticised for utterly failing to pilot the A2 stage and make sure that it was understood in good time.

The whole fiasco has had a further effect on the universities. We know that not many papers were re-graded and not many students will have to move university, finding that they had the right to go to their first choice after having decided that they must go to their second choice. However, there is a large number of young people who were left wondering which university they would be able to attend. When it became clear that a number of papers would be re-graded, they were left hanging, trying to decide whether they should take up their place at their second choice of university or wait in case they could go to their first choice.

As we know, a number decided at the last minute not to go up to university at all this year but to put off their course and take a gap year. I hope that the Minister will tell the House whether he is researching how many unfilled university places there are as a result of students having decided at the last minute not to take them up. Sadly, many will not have got the re-grading that they needed, but even so they may have decided to give up for this year and left places unfilled. I understand that the Government have guaranteed that they will pay the extra costs caused by those students who decide to move university, but will they pay the universities for the cost of any unfilled places resulting from the fiasco that they caused? How many such places will there be? Will that cause a bulge next year when those pupils will want to find a place?

I want to make a further quick criticism of the Government that concerns the intolerable delay in making decisions about the new system of student finance, and I am delighted to see the relevant Minister, the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, in her place. That delay is making life very difficult for those who are trying to decide when and where to go to university next year, and I hope that the Minister who winds up the debate will give an absolute guarantee that the new system will be in place not just before the new university year starts but before students have to make those decisions. Knowledge of what the financial package will be is a critical part of that decision.

There is much excellence in our schools, colleges and universities at present. There are some excellent teachers, head teachers, governors and LEAs, but sadly they are too often let down by too much testing and too little teaching. When the testing proves flawed, as has happened this year, we get the worst of both worlds. For that at least the Government ought to be held responsible, and they ought to take responsibility tonight.

6.28 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): My constituency is much like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann): a collection of satellite communities, including mining villages and rural areas, in this case around Doncaster. He was right to say that young men would come out of school at 15 and be sent down the pit. Young women had nowhere else to go, and like men they suffered from the lack of aspiration. There were generations about whom Governments could say, "They don't need an education. They can work in steel, in mining, on the roads or in other manual jobs." They rejected those people, and that is why today significant numbers of older people cannot read or write.

What we know today is that children's expectations are not those of their grandparents, and that those jobs have enormously declined. Even to do manual work for local authorities, such as that done by carpenters, electricians, plumbers and plasterers, one needs to know how to read and write so that one can organise the work. It is no longer enough to have the manual skills to do the job; one needs to be able to use a computer.

Future generations—and the kids going through school at the moment—face a major and difficult challenge. In mining areas, like many others that depended on heavy industries and manual labour, we are having to challenge some of the ideas of grandparents and parents and, to be honest, of some of those who work in education and support it in our local authorities. I say that as a Labour Member of Parliament from a Labour area.

I remember only a few years ago being in one of the primary schools in my constituency where this Government had provided funds to create a computer learning centre. A new classroom was developed, software and hardware was installed and the kids were there; it was a great day. The head teacher whispered in my ear, "Of course, these kids won't need this." I am pleased that everything that this Government have done has challenged inequality and the idea that a child born in poverty will never have the chance to take GCSEs and A-levels and go to university. That idea was accepted for too long. During 18 years in government, the Conservative party did nothing to tackle such discrimination and inequality.

Several attacks have been made today on this Government's policies, but the Opposition Front-Bench teams have not suggested how they would turn round the situation or where they would find the money to

improve things. We know from the Conservative party conference that the Tories would like to introduce legal home-school contracts. This Government introduced such agreements. Incidentally, before they did so, my children's primary school already had them. Good head teachers saw contracts as a carrot not a stick with which to develop a dialogue with parents on their children entering school. Not only did I and the head teacher sign a home-school contract, my child did as well. That was part of creating a dialogue early on, which is right. The Conservatives opposed home-school agreements when this Government suggested them and accused the Government of being too bureaucratic. Now they want to turn what is a very good way to start communication with parents and families into a legal minefield.

The Conservatives are also interested in vouchers. We all remember the nursery vouchers. They did nothing to improve early-years education or standards in the sector, yet the Conservatives now want to introduce such a system for schools too. They want to give a parent a voucher who would then on their tod find a school for their child. It would be a little like "Supermarket Sweep". The system is flawed, as shown by the introduction of nursery vouchers. Not even Margaret Thatcher or Keith Joseph suggested introducing vouchers for schools, but the new Thatcherites of today want to do so.

Such a system does not in any way recognise the different needs and challenges of each community. It has nothing to do with education for the many. It would promote education for the few who feel able to articulate their children's needs and find a school suitable. It has nothing to do with people wanting to go to a school in their community that meets the standards that they require for their children. It has nothing to do with dealing with truancy or disaffection.

As many of my hon. Friends have said this afternoon, some of the problems in our communities require that schools are integral to the communities and projects on the ground. As someone who sits on the board of a sure start scheme, I know that such schemes are a good example of trying to work with families and schools before children attend school. In order to help schools, my sure start board has funded staff to conduct home-school liaison before children start nursery school.

Such partnership is about creating a community and recognising that most kids spend most of their time outside school. It is about what affects them on their walk to school or in the home. It is about addressing their aspirations and poverty in the community around them. That is why Connexions, sure start and multi-agency work is so important. That is why I am pleased that the most recent education legislation considers giving schools more of a role in developing more on-site wrap-around services—child care, adult learning clubs or whatever—and allowing them the freedom to develop the services with the community that are so desperately needed.

A-levels have been the subject of much of the debate. I do not want to repeat what others have said, but I would like to say this: there was never a golden era when A-levels were not criticised. When I took my O-levels and A-levels, the criticism was that students had just one shot. If they did not perform on that day at that time in that examination, that was it. It did not matter if someone had terrible hay fever that affected their performance or what issues they had brought from home. I remember fellow students feeling that they had done so much work over two years yet none of it had been recorded or appreciated.

There was a debate over why girls were not doing as well as boys, and the old argument that boys could cram things in on the day. There were accusations about cramming and students not getting a learning experience. That is partly why we moved to a system that offered some continual assessment as well as some measure of performance under examination conditions. That is right. That does not mean that there are not issues over striking the right balance, but let us not try to return to what I do not think were the good old days. Is it a bad thing to record as a result of continual assessment young people's progress over the two-year course—GCSEs or A-levels—and their consistent attainment? If the system means that more people get their GCSEs and A-levels, what is wrong with that? Such a system is a truer record of a young person's performance.

We have a real challenge ahead of us. The comprehensive system must be looked at. We must consider how specialist schools should work. I have been a very strong advocate in this House of 14-plus education and the vocational element to it. We must ensure that that works. We must have an education system that tackles the things that do not work but at the same time recognises that, unless we put resources in, we will not be able to change anything.

6.38 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): What outsiders find puzzling about politics is how a debate that embraces a wide number of subjects and in which all Members are interested becomes so polarised. Those on one side make it clear that, as far as they are concerned, the starting date for everything wonderful about the education system happens to be 1997, and that nothing of any value occurred before then. Everybody in the real world understands that the process of government is continuous. All Governments do good things and less good things. The Labour Government have done some good things and less good things, and the same is true of previous Conservative Governments.

Obviously, an Opposition day debate puts into sharp focus the things that might be wrong. That is the purpose of opposition, but the point of the debate is not to denigrate everything in the education system but to focus criticism properly where it might be made. Some Labour Members have tended to take a blinkered view that there is only one starting date and that only one party cares about a particular topic. That runs counter to the intelligence of the population, who know that that is not true and that it is not the way to go about things.

As for criticising aspects of new Conservative policy, the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and her colleagues might remember that some of the things that we had in our policy ideas box a few years ago are now the policy of the Labour party and the Labour Government. I enjoyed Prime Minister's Question Time today, at which the Prime Minister teased my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about completing the Thatcher revolution, when many members of the right hon. Gentleman's own party believe that he knows more about completing the Thatcher revolution than anyone on the Opposition Benches.

[Alistair Burt]

I shall concentrate my remarks on the concern about examinations expressed in the Opposition motion. Three aspects cause me particular concern. I am puzzled about why the fuss about improvement—the higher quality of students and their grades—arose in the first place. I am concerned about the Government's role in understanding that the structure of the new examination would lead to problems. Finally, I am worried about the reasons why there should be any perception of Government interference in the process.

First, I am puzzled about why, when it emerged that A-level grades would be better than in the past, there was such an extraordinary panic among the Government and the examination boards. As the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) made clear, the whole structure of the examination was designed so that hard-working pupils would achieve better grades. First, they were taking a public examination at the end of the first year of the sixth form, which had not previously taken place; secondly, the way in which the examination was structured and the modules introduced ensured that those who worked hard could count on reaching a basic standard, and that a significant improvement in grades was highly likely.

I should have thought that a Government who always castigate Opposition parties if they raise a scintilla of doubt about grade inflation would have spent the summer preparing the British public for a significant improvement in A-level grades and explaining precisely how that improvement, which I find entirely understandable, had come about. At what stage did someone suddenly think that it was a problem? I cannot understand that. The examination was set up and people worked harder, so grades should have been better—but at some stage somebody panicked. Why? We have never had a clear explanation.

The second source of my puzzlement and concern is how the Government could have known nothing about the way in which the very nature and structure of the examination would lead to higher grades and cause some of the problems on which Mike Tomlinson reported. How did they not know that that was going on? That is the most significant challenge facing the Government tonight.

The House debates many issues that affect people's lives only tangentially, but occasionally we do things that affect people on a personal level for the rest of their lives. In his eloquent and excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) described the personal difficulties affecting some of his constituents that will mark them for life. When a great principle goes wrong, the bottom line is that people are damaged. The Government cannot and should not walk away from their responsibility for that, and they will not do so. We have had only the first major report and this is only the first Commons debate, but there will be more, because the Government are responsible for real damage on this occasion.

First, how did the original intention behind the AS-level system—to broaden the post-16 curriculum and to have five subjects going down to three—get lost, so that it became four subjects going down to three? There is not much broadening in that. Was the upheaval really necessary if we were to have only four, not five, subjects initially? How did that come about? Who took that decision?

Secondly, the recommendation was that the relative weighting of AS and A2 should be 40:60, to acknowledge the fact that the first year examination must necessarily be easier because students had had only one year of study. Who took the decision to make the weighting 50:50? Name the Minister who took that decision and explain the reasoning that led to their failure to understand that that would cause the very inflation about which the Government are now concerned. Was it a wise decision, who took it, and why was the original 40:60 recommendation turned down?

Thirdly, there is the issue of where the grade boundaries should be set and the grades defined. As Mike Tomlinson reports, the system contains no definition of what constitutes an A-grade, a C-grade or an E-grade. How did that come about? Who failed to spot the omission? Which Minister was responsible? The QCA is not an independent organisation: it is accountable, not to Parliament, but to the Department for Education and Skills. How is it that throughout the years of development, the problem was not spotted?

Is it true that at a relatively early stage, in 1998 or 1999, meetings took place between Government advisers and representatives of the QCA—meetings at which senior officials from the DFES were present—during which the deficiencies in structure were brought out? If it is true, why were the problems not communicated to Ministers? Did they not know? Why did they not take responsibility?

Can Ministers explain how a school that knows what it is doing—of which there are thousands throughout the country— can produce a pupil who works hard and gets an A-grade on an examination, but receives a U-grade on a piece of coursework? How is that possible? We have had no explanation so far. We have raised all those issues, but received no answers—certainly not from the Secretary of State, who hardly mentioned the examinations issue.

The third source of puzzlement is the perception of what the Government wanted and the suspicion of interference. Could it be that in education, as in every other sphere of public service, nothing in this country moves unless the Government know all about it; and when things go their way, they claim credit, but when something goes wrong, their hands are snatched away as though they had had a collective electric shock, and it is all somebody else's fault? I can provide examples of that. We have not gone into the individual learning accounts scandal today, although the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough mentioned it and we could have explored it. A system was set up to help people to get back into the world of education, but they were let down because of chronic Government failure, for which Ministers have never taken responsibility.

When the Government manipulate access to university as they have been doing, is it any wonder that people suspect they might be guilty of manipulating the examination system as well? I agree with Mike Tomlinson that there is no evidence of direct ministerial interference, but everyone in the Chamber and outside can understand how such a perception might arise, given

the fact of an interfering, manipulative, centralising, authoritarian, bullying Government. That is what the Government are, and that is why, when something goes wrong, people outside suspect that the Government had a hand in it.

If we are to move on, we have to recognise that the Government are at fault and Ministers have to acknowledge that. They have to explain how they knew nothing until we reached the current stage. They have to answer the questions that thousands of school pupils and their teachers are asking about how the individual who should be responsible can pass on that responsibility to others.

If we want to find a way out of the uncertainty and translate the good things that happen in some schools to schools throughout the country—as we all do, without exception and regardless of party—the one thing that is needed is certainty in the system. The Government are guilty of having failed the public: they have introduced uncertainty into the examination system, which has been thoroughly damaging to the chances of hundreds of thousands of this country's students. What is needed to restore that certainty are an independent inquiry into the examination system—including GCSEs as well as A-levels—and an independent QCA. If we can achieve those things, we might rescue something from the mess.

Finally, I want the Government to answer this question: if the boards' perception was that somebody somewhere wanted grades to be lowered, how did that perception come about? How was it communicated to them, or did they just make it up? How did Bill Stubbs come to perceive that the marks that pupils had worked hard to achieve and which the examinations had been constructed to create were wrong and had to be lowered? Was it the fairies, or did somebody somewhere give the boards a real sense that that had to be done? Bearing in mind the Government's track record, most of us know the answer.

6.50 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), for whom I have had respect for many years. My respect has been greatly enhanced in the past few minutes. The hon. Gentleman told us that the Opposition care about education. This is an Opposition day debate, but most Opposition Members have been playing truant: for most of the time, hardly one sixth of a primary school class has been sitting on the Opposition Benches—and this is their own debate.

The debate has, of course, nothing to do with education: it is all about trying to exploit the discomfort of A-level students. That strategy was revealed and undermined this afternoon when the Leader of the Opposition told all A-level students that, despite their hard work, their A-levels were not worth the paper on which they were written. That is shameful. I hope that in the last few minutes of the debate an Opposition Front Bencher will apologise to A-level students in my constituency and elsewhere for what the right hon. Gentleman said, and will say that he did not mean it and that he withdraws his statement. I do not expect that we will hear that apology.

The opening remarks of the Opposition Front Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), were presented to us without him being able to tell us of the changed achievements of 11-year-olds between when the Government took office and now. I shall put the changes on the record. The percentage of pupils achieving the expected level 4 in English at the age of 11 rose from 63 per cent. in 1997 to 75 per cent. last year. It rose from 62 per cent. to 71 per cent. in maths and from 69 per cent. to 87 per cent. in science. I am proud of what pupils, teachers, governors and parents have achieved. I am proud also of the Government's part in that.

There is still much more to do, but when I became a Member about five years ago primary schools in my constituency were operating with broken windows, leaking roofs, very few books and no IT equipment—rotten conditions in which children were supposed to learn and in which teachers were supposed to teach. I am proud that we have been able to do something about that.

Rob Marris: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Pond: I ask my hon. Friend to forgive me. We are very short of time, so I cannot take interventions.

An important part of the improvement that we have achieved is reform, but we have also been able to put more resources into education. As has been said, the resources that have been made available have lubricated the necessary changes. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the announcement this week that Gravesham will be included as one of 13 excellence clusters, which will mean extra resources and extra investment for schools in some of the most deprived parts of my constituency.

Kent county council recently announced that it has been able to make use of the extra education resources to open nine new nurseries, which is eight more than we had before. That should be a cause for celebration, so I was a little surprised to find primary head teachers in my constituency slightly down in the mouth when I met them a few days ago. They had recently had a presentation from Kent county council, which is Conservative controlled, although I am sure that that has nothing to do with what I am about to say. The presentation informed them that, despite the 6 per cent. increase in education spending to 2005–06, there will be a loss to schools in Kent of 8 per cent.—£40 million over the medium term. That is equivalent of the closure of every school in my constituency, and an inability to meet basic standards.

I have the presentation that was made by an officer of Kent county council. I shall circulate it to every head teacher in my constituency. I hope that the Department will ensure that it goes to every head teacher in Kent. The letter that I and other Members received from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 8 July underlines the fact that the Government have given a guarantee that no authority schools

> "will lose out in real terms as a result of introducing the new system."

That refers to the new local government finance system. The letter continues:

> "This protection of the funding assessment will be in addition to the protection offered by the proposed continued operation of grant floors and ceilings."

[Mr. Pond]

It is disappointing that, despite this being an Opposition day debate on education, we have not heard any positive proposals from the Opposition. They have attempted only to criticise what the Government have achieved, often in difficult circumstances, over five years. They have made no attempt to congratulate students on what they achieved through hard work. To tell young people that their qualifications are not worth the paper on which they are written is shameful. I hope that Opposition Members will take their last opportunity in the debate to pay tribute to those young people and perhaps to give some credit for what has been achieved in education.

6.57 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity briefly to contribute to the debate, which has been interesting, not least because of Labour Members' desire to steer well away from any justification of the Government's activities and of the conduct of the Department, which is the subject of the debate and on which I shall focus. Happily, there will be other opportunities to discuss how Conservative policy will be able to contribute to an increase in standards in schools.

As for the conduct of the Department, I shall refer briefly to three issues, each of which has the same characteristics—namely, that Ministers are responsible for their decisions. They should have known that problems were occurring: indeed, they were warned that problems would occur. Over the summer—this is the second day after the conclusion of the summer recess—the chickens came home to roost, yet Ministers will not take responsibility for what occurred.

During the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) I had the opportunity to refer to the difficulties associated with the Criminal Records Bureau. Ministers knew that there had been problems virtually since the beginning of the programme in February. They had been warned. In July, Home Office Ministers said that teachers would have access to list 1999 and that there would not be a problem. They said that if timetables were met, there would not be a backlog by the end of the summer, but they failed. It was their responsibility, having introduced the system. I declare an interest because I was a member of the Committee that considered the Protection of Children Bill. Ministers knew that they had to get right an important issue. They delayed the introduction of the system so as to get it right, but they failed to do so.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have been saying clearly for more than three years that schools should make decisions on the merits of a pupil's exclusion, and that the final decision should rest with the school. Action should then be taken outside the school through the improvement of pupil referral units, or progress centres. That would ensure that discipline and decisions made in schools were defended. It would restore an ethos within schools and remove one of the reasons why teachers find it increasingly difficult to teach and to maintain discipline.

Some of my constituents work at the OCR. The Secretary of State has sought to rely on the Tomlinson report but to take account only of its second half. She says that there is no documentary evidence of Ministers having any responsibility for creating a perception that grade boundaries should be redefined to secure a particular statistical outcome for the 2001 results. The front end of the report, however, is all about the policy decisions that have been taken. I shall not rehearse those decisions in detail as they were mentioned by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt). Ministers decided that although the content of the AS course made up 40 per cent. of the demands placed upon students, 50 per cent. of the marks would be available for it. Ministers decided that it would be the subject of retakes. That meant, as Tomlinson said, that within the design of the system, it was implied that there would be higher grades than would have been the case in the legacy A-level.

As the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) made clear, Ministers decided to proceed with A2 without piloting and with limited piloting for AS-levels, and Mr. Tomlinson could find no justification for proceeding without proper piloting of the A2-levels. Nevertheless, those decisions were made. It is clear that the exam boards were unable to find any common standard or any mechanism by which to aggregate the results from different years, with different demands placed upon students, in order to produce one result. They were told that they should try to make that statistically more consistent with the previous year's A-level results, with no mechanism for doing that. The QCA did not give them one.

More than a year ago, as I said in the course of the speech from the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, given the problems that had emerged in relation to the AS-level, the Secretary of State, whom I am pleased to see in her place to hear the debate, said that she would take responsibility for seeing that the reforms would go through in a way that would secure the A-levels as a crucial benchmark of quality. More than a year later, we find that that did not happen. The examination boards had no mechanism established through the QCA to aggregate results in a form that would relate directly the standards from the legacy A-level to the standard set in the new A-level.

It was to have been a new base year, but by some mechanism—as yet we do not know precisely how it happened—the QCA was encouraging the examination boards to treat the two as though they were precisely the same, when in practice they were different examinations, with different structures, imposing different demands at different stages of the sixth form period. It should have been acknowledged as a new base year, but it was not. The Secretary of State took responsibility more than a year ago for delivering those reforms and making sure that the Department would get them right. They went wrong, as other things went wrong, and the Secretary of State has failed to take responsibility for them today.

7.2 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): It is a pleasure, as always, to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who made an excellent speech, as is typical of him. He reminded the House that in all the current crises in education, Ministers were warned; Ministers had notice before they happened. They were warned that the way in

which they introduced AS-levels and the new sixth form curriculum would cause problems. They proceeded regardless. They were warned that the Criminal Records Bureau could not complete the checks in time for schools to open at the beginning of the school term, and they failed to take action. On all the key issues in education, Ministers have had adequate warning, but their response has been less than adequate.

Opening the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) referred to the measure of the Government being intervention without substance, and he prayed in aid the Minister for School Standards, who used the wonderful metaphor of the doughnut—the education policy with a hole in the centre, even though it has a lot of icing on top. It was a brilliant metaphor, if I may say so, and the hon. Gentleman should take full credit for it. It says everything that it is necessary to say about the Government's approach to education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford went on to speak about the fiasco of the Criminal Records Bureau checks, and the fact that 100 people had been wrongly accused by the Criminal Records Bureau and thousands are stuck in the system. Even more worryingly, perhaps, there has been no common sense and no consistency in the way in which the Government have dealt with that crisis. There was advice from the Secretary of State one day and contrary advice the next. Schools were left for an unacceptably long period not knowing which way to turn. Ultimately, they were left to make their own decisions and to risk the consequences.

The Minister for School Standards confirmed to me in a written answer today that no guidance was given to the Criminal Records Bureau about the way in which people who have an unbroken record as teachers should be treated. There was no differentiation between those who were applying new, those who had no record of good service in our schools, and those who did have such a record. That, again, was an appalling breach of common sense.

In the debate we heard about the Government's record on truancy and the fact that another target had been missed. Truancy was meant to go down, but it has gone up. We heard about the Government failing to meet their primary school targets. We heard even from the Secretary of State that she stands by the targets, but I think she said that she had no idea how she would reach them. She thought that they were worth while in themselves, but she had no practical suggestions as to how we would move away from the plateau which she accepted we had reached.

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he agrees with the statement this afternoon by the leader of his party that A-levels are not worth the paper that they are written on?

Mr. Brady: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has bothered to drag himself into the Chamber at this late stage of an education debate to read out a script from his Whips Office. He has done it perfectly well, but what he needs to address, what Ministers need to address, and what the Secretary of State signally failed to deal with earlier is the A-level crisis into which the Government have plunged the country. What he has failed to deal with, what the Secretary of State has failed to deal with—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. The House must quieten down.

Mr. Brady: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that even at this late stage, Labour Members and Ministers will begin to address seriously the crisis facing tens of thousands of young people in our country. Hon. Members are trying to make silly politics out of a situation that has been created entirely by Ministers.

Mr. Tomlinson, the author of the Tomlinson report, said today:

> "After a month of inquiries, I still don't know what the standard ought to be. It is worrying that we have an examination system where the standards have not been adequately defined for examiners, teachers and pupils."

That is what the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) should be addressing, that is what the Secretary of State failed to address at the beginning of the debate, and that is the shameful record that Ministers ought to be defending.

We heard from the Secretary of State a shockingly complacent catalogue. She believes, apparently, that in the years since she has been a Minister in the Education Department, we have had nothing but success. At a time when we have had a catalogue of errors, crises and mistakes directly attributable to Ministers, she believes that nothing has ever gone wrong. All she is doing today is trying to throw up a smokescreen. On exclusions, she said at the beginning of the debate, "My views are clear that schools must have the choice". I, on the other hand, have been entirely consistent, as have my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brady: No. The hon. Lady should listen. Having served, as I did, as a member of the Select Committee on Education and Employment, she should know something about the subject. If she, like the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister earlier today, does not understand what the Government have done in relation to exclusions, she should listen.

The Secretary of State referred to the new guidance that has been introduced for appeals panels. She said nothing about the guidance that was introduced in 1999—the guidance that stated that schools must not exclude pupils under any circumstances until a variety of prior alternative strategies have been tried. That guidance said prior alternative strategies must be tried in respect of teachers who were assaulted or threatened, and the Secretary of State was a Minister in the Department for Education and Skills when it was introduced.

The Prime Minister said earlier that independent appeals panels were introduced in 1987 by the then Conservative Government. That is true, but let us consider the facts. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State must start to get a grip and take some responsibility, as her fingerprints are on all these issues, going back to 1997. She has had a ministerial role in the Department

[Mr. Brady]

for Education and Skills as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary, a Minister of State and Secretary of State. She was a Minister in 1998 when the new Labour Government gave new powers to the appeals panels to reinstate excluded children. For the first time, those decisions were binding on all parties involved.

The relevant measures can be found in section 67 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The Secretary of State and I both served on the Standing Committee that considered the measures, which I am sure are currently her bedtime reading; indeed, I imagine that that is one of the reasons why she has sleepless nights. Section 67(1) states:

"A local education authority shall make arrangements for enabling the relevant person to appeal against any decision of the governing body under section 66 not to reinstate a pupil".

Subsection (3) states:

"The decision of an appeal panel on an appeal pursuant to arrangements made under subsection (1) shall be binding on the relevant person, the governing body".

The Government made appeal panel findings binding. Last week, when the Secretary of State bungled into the circumstances surrounding the exclusions at Glyn school, she did not know the law and made a huge mess as a result.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): In my former career as a lecturer, records of achievement were frequently put on my desk. Would the record of achievement of the Tory years be worth the paper that it is written on?

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman has been present for some of the debate, for which I give him credit, but he does not appear to have gained much from the experience. [HON. MEMBERS: "That's not surprising."] Opposition Members can say that, but I imagine that the hon. Members for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) have different views, although they may have failed to enlighten their colleagues in their contributions.

Caroline Flint: The hon. Gentleman may recall that we served on the Select Committee on Education and Employment when it produced a report on disaffection. Does he agree with the Committee's finding—and there was consensus throughout the Committee—that unnecessary exclusions could be avoided if schools intervened earlier and used different strategies in relation to disruptive behaviour?

Mr. Brady: I am delighted that the hon. Lady has made such a sensible point. Of course, nobody wants schools to resort to exclusion where it is unnecessary. On the Glyn school, however, in relation to which the Secretary of State ventured to express the view that pupils should not be excluded, we are considering a case in which it is necessary to exclude and inappropriate to require the school to readmit pupils. None the less, we agree that early intervention is right and she makes an entirely sensible point.

Rob Marris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brady: I have taken a lot of interventions and I should like to make a little more headway, as we do not have much time.

The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) also contributed to the debate. He is a man for whom I have enormous affection and a very high regard. In the past five years or so, he has perhaps made more contributions that have been a slight irritant to those on his Front Bench than entirely helpful and supportive ones. The fact that he came to the Chamber to make a speech that was entirely an apology for the Government's record demonstrates the depth of the hole into which he thinks that they have already dug themselves. He suggested that the whole thing was about money and that there was no need for anything else in the whole of education policy. He went on to praise the fact that the Government had intervened massively in schools and education, taking away from the rights of parents, heads and teachers to run the affairs of schools. However, he also said that that had gone far enough, that moves should now be made in the opposite direction and that far less intervention was now needed. I was delighted to hear his contribution, but I do not believe that he did justice to the depth of the crisis that is affecting our schools and young people.

In an excellent and balanced contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) noted that, after trumpeting the importance of breadth with regard to the introduction of AS-levels and curriculum 2000, Ministers went on to reduce that breadth and undo precisely that which had been the intended purpose of introducing AS-levels. The decision was taken by Ministers in the Department for Education and Skills at a time when the Secretary of State was a Minister, so she was again party to that decision.

The Secretary of State cannot hide from the fact that she has been an Education Minister continuously for the past five years and a part of all the decisions and problems that are now coming home to roost. She has been party to the demoralisation of the teaching profession to which my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) referred. The collapse of discipline is largely due to the new guidance to appeals panels that she and her colleagues introduced—guidance that sought to make it impossible to exclude in any circumstances. As my hon. Friend said, it is now one of the principal reasons why teachers are leaving the profession in droves. The Secretary of State was keen to take credit for the fact that new teachers are coming into the profession. Of course, that is welcome—

Estelle Morris: That is the first time we have heard that.

Mr. Brady: That is simply not true. We welcome new teachers coming into the profession, but the Secretary of State must understand that that achieves nothing if she and her colleagues are driving out teachers more rapidly than they can be recruited. The Government's record on exclusions is one of the principal reasons why that has been happening.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) made an important contribution in which he spoke about the Government's role in the A-levels fiasco. He tellingly said that life was not a dress rehearsal and mentioned that Ministers had been warned that the fiasco was not over yet.

All that we have heard from those on the Labour Benches is complacency and self-justification. We have heard no apology for the fact that so many young people have been hurt by their actions and no hint that they understand the harm that has been done to our examinations system and the young people who have been affected. It is time for the Minister to stand up and put that right. He should come to the Dispatch Box with some real contrition and an understanding of the damage that the Government have done. Only if he does so will people have any faith that the Government will be able to restore confidence in the system.

7.17 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): Today's debate has been much more illuminating than any of us could have expected. I shall come to the comments of the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) in a moment, as I should like first to congratulate some Back Benchers on their excellent contributions. The hon. Members for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) all said that they wanted to congratulate teachers and students throughout the country on the hard work that they are doing and the improvements in their schools, which should be recognised.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) made a typically insightful call for more informed professionalism and devolution of power to head teachers. My hon. Friends the Members for Erewash (Liz Blackman), for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) drew on their experience to talk about how schools were changing in their areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) did everyone a service by correcting some grotesque misinformation that has been circulated about the local government finance review.

I should like to pause for a moment to address what the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) said, as he made a serious speech in which he focused on the genuine hurt and anger that many young people rightly feel about the way in which they have been treated this year. In particular, he asked some very detailed questions about the psychology papers of Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations. I cannot answer for the examinations boards and it would be wrong for me to do so, as they are independent bodies. However, I assure him that we will follow independent advice—*[Interruption.]* This is an independent system that has been supported throughout the years. I assume that he is not calling for the nationalisation of exam boards. We will follow the reform proposals that emerge from the second stage of the Tomlinson inquiry, which will include the role and regulation of exam boards.

The Back-Bench speeches put to shame the performance of the Opposition Front Bench. Within an hour of the "quiet man" rubbishing the efforts of hundreds and thousands of students throughout the country, the hon. Member for Ashford came to the Dispatch Box to do a somersault on a policy that he announced only last week.

It is not AS-levels that are not worth the paper on which they are written, but the titles "Leader of the Opposition" and "Conservative spokesman on education". The Government are ready to build up and support our education system, while the Opposition run it down. The motion refers only to confusion and problems; it does not mention the dedication of the nation's teachers or the achievements of the nation's children. It does not refer to improved Ofsted reports or rising teacher numbers. It does not acknowledge that the revenue budget will grow by £1,100 per pupil by 2005–06 or that the capital budget will increase three times.

Chris Grayling: If all is so rosy in the garden, why are so many teachers leaving the profession?

Mr. Miliband: One would not realise from the hon. Gentleman's remarks that there are 20,400 more teachers now than in 1997. Have the Opposition not read the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development study, which showed schools' improving performance? Have not they noticed the rising standards in our primary schools, which now lead international practice? Have not they read the chief inspector's report, which states that seven in 10 classes are good and that a quarter are very good, and that nine out 10 schools had improved since the previous inspection? Have not Conservative spokesmen noticed in their constituencies that, for example, £45 million extra has been spent in capital spending in Kent, and that £9 million extra has been spent on buildings in Trafford? The simple truth is that Conservative Members have noticed all those matters, but they cannot admit it. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) said that he freely admitted that

"Conservative Governments did not do enough for education."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 4 July 2002; c. 185WH.]

We agree. No wonder they spent the past week expressing their regret.

We have increased spending on every child by more than £500 a year in our first five years, whereas the Conservatives cut it by £120 a year. Standards in primary schools have improved dramatically in the past five years; they were stagnant for 18 years under the Conservative party. They are ashamed that although we now have the fastest improving education system in the industrialised world, they took us to 42nd in the world education league.

The Department, under the Secretary of State, supports good schools. We support good teachers and good performance. We are the first to say that there is further to go. We are not satisfied with simply being better than the Conservative party. We are ambitious for our education system, and we are raising, not lowering, expectations. We know what will make a difference.

Reform of school leadership is vital so that the 1,400 toughest schools get the extra help that they need to gain the leadership that they deserve. I encourage the hon. Member for Ashford to listen to our plans for the leadership incentive grant, because we shall first offer them to the Conservative party in case it wants to benefit from them.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Why is the plan not available to primary schools that are in difficulties?

Mr. Miliband: We have many programmes for primary improvement. The leadership incentive grant is

[Mr. Miliband]

designed to tackle the problem that 50 per cent. of young people leave secondary schools without five good GCSEs. We are proud of achievements in primary schools and we want to go further. However, the priority is the secondary sector. We are therefore committed to improving the structures of secondary schooling, too. We have a special mission for every school and collaboration will also be open to every school. In 57 city academies and 2,000 specialist schools that will give a new start to a comprehensive—I stress the word—intake of young people in areas where the education system has failed.

The Labour party is leading the way in reforming the school work force. We are providing not simply the 10,000 more teachers that we promised in our manifesto or the 25 per cent. increase in teachers' pay since 1997 but also the extra support staff that will facilitate the contractual change to give teachers time to teach.

We are also committed to radical reform of partnerships outside the classroom, and responsibilities of parents for discipline exercised outside the courts, not inside them, where the Conservative party wants to drag us. At least, we believed that until today. We want head teachers in the lead, teachers focused on teaching and schools modernised to support high quality learning.

We have heard much today about A-levels. Three weeks ago, the Opposition called for resignations because the problem was so great. Yesterday, they called for resignations because they were disappointed that it was so small. What are the facts? There is overwhelming support in the education world for broader A-levels. The Government delayed the plans for that which we inherited in 1997. There have been serious failings by the QCA in setting subject-specific grade criteria. There was a perception of pressure by exam board chiefs, not from the Government but from the QCA, to match this year's results with last year's.

Chris Grayling: The Minister claims that the problem is small. Will he apologise for that comment to the more than 1,000 pupils who lost places at the university that they should have attended?

Mr. Miliband: I did not say that the problem was small. I said that Conservative Members spent yesterday claiming that it was small. Mike Tomlinson and Bill Stubbs have made no accusations of political interference. Labour Members are happy to acknowledge rising standards; we shall not spend time attacking the young people who do better. It is time to end the English curse, invoked every year, that somehow more means worse. It does not.

As long as one third of school classes are not yet good, the Labour party will not rest.

Alistair Burt: Before you leave the A-level examination fiasco, can you answer the question—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not answering any questions.

Alistair Burt: Before the Minister leaves the A-level fiasco, will he answer the questions that were posed by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) and me? If the Department knew everything about the incorrect structure and definition of the examination, why did not the Government take action? That contributed markedly to the failures of the summer. Why did the Minister do nothing?

Mr. Miliband: The answer is simple: we did not know that the A-levels were going wrong. If we had known, we would have corrected the error. *[Interruption.]* We did not know. The Government are responsible for the structure of the exam system, not the daily assessment procedures. It would be wrong to get involved in them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Miliband: I am very tempted to give way, but I am determined not to do that—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Miliband: The Labour party will not rest as long as one third of school classes are not good, secondary schools wait for the best classrooms, and working class children are half as likely to get five good GCSEs as upper class children.

As long as the Conservative party preaches concern and contrition but practises hypocrisy and humbug, we shall not rest. Last week, the Leader of the Opposition said that Conservatives had to stop living in the past. Today, he must be in despair. They say that travel broadens the mind; it does not for the Conservative party. It has done a U-turn on the AS-levels that it invented; last week, it did a U-turn on appeals panels, which it also invented. At 3 pm today, abolishing appeals panels remained Conservative party policy.

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Miliband: No, I am winding up. At 4 pm, the hon. Member for Ashford said at the Dispatch Box not that he would abolish appeals panels but that he would reinstate LEA panels to second-guess them. Yet the Conservative party wants to abolish LEAs. It is not fit for Opposition.

Three years ago, the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), as shadow Education Secretary, promised to match Labour spending pound for pound. The hon. Member for Ashford did not say that. He talked to the quiet man from Chingford. The compassionate Conservative stated candidly in a pamphlet two years ago that

"public services . . . had to be paid for and invested in."

The quiet man listened, but a nasty man from Folkestone was also present. The hon. Member for Ashford went in saying that spending had attractions in principle—that was the extent of his compassion. He came out saying that cuts were the only option. That is the reality of Conservative policy.

Last week, the difference between us became clearer. The Government are steadily advancing to spending £5,000 a year per pupil in the state sector. The

Conservative party opposes that. However, last week, the hon. Member for Ashford revealed that he was willing to spend £5,000 per pupil on those who go into the private sector. Private good, public bad—they are the same old Tories. Every Conservative Member will be asked from now until polling day why £5,000 is not good enough for state sector education if it is good enough for private education. Parents will ask every Tory Member of Parliament and candidate, "Why will you spend £5,000 on a few children when you won't spend it on mine?" The hon. Member for Ashford cannot answer that question, which will haunt him.

One can talk about concern or act on it. One has got to walk the walk as well as talk the talk. We are walking into the Lobby to vote against the motion because that is right for the nation's children. I urge all hon. Members to follow us.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 191, Noes 293.

Division No. 321] **[7:29 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton – Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat – Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell – Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M – Worcs)*
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M – Kent)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M – Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Treglinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger – Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Watkinson and Mr. David Wilshire

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*

Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis – Thomas, Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca – Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall – Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe Lunesdale)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stewart, David *(Inverness E Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House applauds the priority the Government attaches to education and congratulates the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on her excellent leadership of the education system; notes the current record levels of sustained investment in

education with an increase from £41.6 billion in 2001–02 to £57.8 billion in 2005–06; welcomes rising standards and progress being made in schools up and down the country, congratulating in particular all those who played a part in achieving the best ever results in literacy and numeracy for 11 year olds, with 75 per cent. making the grade in English and 73 per cent. in mathematics compared with less than a half in 1997; welcomes the importance the Government attaches to tackling indiscipline and non-attendance at schools; notes that while the Criminal Records Bureau continues to improve its performance, the Department's interim "List 99" measures are allowing schools to operate with a full complement of staff; expresses its sympathy for the pupils, parents and teachers who have been affected by the recent 'A' level grading problems; but congratulates the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for her decisive action in setting up an independent inquiry under Mike Tomlinson to restore confidence in the exam system.

Rural Economy

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): We now come to the debate on the rural economy. I should announce to the House that Mr. Speaker has chosen the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.42 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I beg to move,

That this House recognises that the livelihood of millions of British people depends on the rural economy; notes that British agriculture is in the throes of its worst recession since the 1930s; regrets the burden of regulation imposed on farms and other rural businesses; expresses concern about the lack of affordable housing and the strain on public services in rural areas; and calls upon the Government to acknowledge the gravity of the crisis in the countryside and to address effectively and urgently the problems faced by rural communities.

Britain today is an overwhelmingly urban and suburban society. What I found most striking about last month's countryside march was the fact that those who took part identified themselves as a minority in society whose interests were being ignored by those in positions of power. The reasons for that are straightforward. Our farmers and growers are struggling with the worst recession to hit their industry since the 1930s. Red tape and regulation are holding back efforts to develop new enterprises within agriculture or in the wider rural economy. Too often, police officers are not seen on patrol in the village streets but glimpsed occasionally behind the wheel of a passing patrol car. There are severe pressures on transport services and affordable housing, and rural post offices and rural magistrates courts continue to close. All that carries a human cost. The rural stress information network, which is an independent charity, reports that calls to its helpline are now running at twice the rate of two years ago before the foot and mouth epidemic began.

I admit that the mood in the countryside is not solely due to disillusionment with the present Government. There is also disaffection with the political process and with politicians of all parties. That more general feeling of mistrust found expression in the mass abstention from voting in last year's general election, about which every one of us, from whichever side of the House we come, ought to be concerned. However, it is accurate to say that there is an especially strong sense of grievance against the present Government. It was not a politician but the chairman of another charity, the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution, Mr. Wallis, who last month wrote to the Prime Minister about the views of farmers. His statement sums up the much wider public perception in our rural communities. He wrote:

"Your Government is, at best, not bothered, at worst hostile to the interests of a strong GB farming industry. It is felt that trust between the farming community and DEFRA is mutually at an all time low."

The Government started with an enormous fund of good will in rural as well as in urban areas. Part of the reason for this change, which requires some explanation, is the behaviour and language of Ministers. When someone as senior as the Deputy Prime Minister talks in the most scathing terms of

"the contorted faces of the Countryside Alliance"

he causes real hurt and resentment among the hundreds of thousands of decent men and women who have supported successive peaceful marches and

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demonstrations. When the Minister for Rural Affairs said that he thought that those who marched last month were a little confused, it spoke volumes about the Government's unwillingness to listen. I genuinely wish that many more Labour Members had come to London on 22 September, not necessarily to agree with all or even some of what the marchers said, but to show, like some of their colleagues, a readiness to listen to the views that were expressed, often in desperate terms, by the marchers that day.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): My hon. Friend will be aware that the Minister for the Environment attended the previous countryside march, which we thought was courageous and fair-minded.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the contrast in the behaviour of Ministers then and now. That shows that the confidence that people in the countryside have in the Government has been sapped in the past few years.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Would the hon. Gentleman blame some of us for not attending the march given the tactics of some of its supporters? A supporter attached to my garden gate a poster advertising the march and took pictures of it, which I assumed would be used in some propaganda. That did not endear me to their cause.

Mr. Lidington: The illicit poster on the hon. Gentleman's gate has obviously been preying on his mind for some weeks, and I am glad that he has had the opportunity to get it off his chest. I do not for a moment defend such action, but he has overlooked the fact that more than 400,000 of our fellow citizens were prepared to give up a Sunday and travel long distances into London if necessary to make their views known. It would have helped not only the Government—I am not usually in the business of trying to help the Government—but the cause of democracy and a sense of reconnection between public and politicians had more than a handful of members and supporters of the Government been present to listen.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Is my hon. Friend aware that those of us who were on the march were conscious of the fact that, even though the Government have argued that this issue is a matter for the House and not for them, as they are merely in charge of the process, the marchers, wherever they came from and whatever principled ground they held, were against the Government of the day and those in power?

Mr. Lidington: I think my hon. Friend has summed up views expressed by a great many people that day.

The trouble with the Government's approach to rural policy is the same as the trouble with their approach on so many other fronts. All too often, we have seen a gap between what was promised and what has in practice been delivered. The Government—admirably—committed themselves to rural-proofing their policies; yet 12 months after the Government entered into that commitment, the chairman of the Countryside Agency, a Government-appointed chairman of a Government body, reported

"most Departments have done the minimum necessary to introduce rural proofing".

He stated:

"I am not convinced that policy makers generally are giving sufficient thought to the impact on the countryside and the people who live there when they develop policies".

It is not necessary to look far to discover why Mr. Cameron reached that conclusion. Let us consider the representation. Ministers are still committed to a system of regional government that will inevitably take power and influence away from rural communities. In the sort of regional assembly that Ministers envisage, with perhaps 30 elected members from across the region—30 members probably picked in accordance with some region-wide party list—the focus is bound to be on the interests of the towns and cities. Their priorities will receive the most attention.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): The regional assemblies will, of course, be introduced only if voted for by the people whom they will seek to represent.

May I also draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the experience of rural development agencies? All of them, I think—in particular, one in my area—have taken a significant interest in the rural economy, in how to make it thrive, and in how to establish a dedicated representative to fulfil the necessary role.

Mr. Lidington: I will go as far as this with the hon. Gentleman. Travelling around the country, I have encountered examples of budgets allocated to regional bodies being spent well; but I have also encountered numerous complaints from elected councillors and others who have said that the bureaucracy involved in trying to obtain a grant from a regional body is so complicated as to deter many grass-roots organisations, even local authorities—especially in rural areas—from making the attempt in the first place.

David Burnside (South Antrim): In the case of regional assemblies, the problem is not grants. Until midnight on Monday, we had an Assembly in Northern Ireland. My views on the Assembly are pretty anti, but all parties in the Assembly—DUP, Ulster Unionist, Alliance, Women's Coalition, you name it: there are so many parties in Northern Ireland—right over to Sinn Fein believed that agriculture in Northern Ireland would be much better served by a regional assembly than by a national Government.

Mr. Lidington: There is, I think, a profound difference between the history and representative traditions of Northern Ireland and those of England. In England in particular, we have looked to counties, boroughs and cities to provide a focus for local representation.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): I hoped that my hon. Friend would illustrate his concern by reference to Yorkshire and Humberside. North Yorkshire contains 14 per cent. of the population of that region. The remaining 86 per cent. are already in metropolitan

areas. Therefore, the fate of two-tier government in Yorkshire and Humberside will be settled by the 86 per cent. who have no experience of it.

Mr. Lidington: My right hon. Friend puts his point well. It has also been made to me by people living in rural Northumberland, who are worried about the creation of a north-east regional assembly, and by people living in rural Cheshire and Cumbria who are worried about the possibility of a north-west regional assembly. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) says that exactly the same fears are being expressed in his area.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): We do not have natural regions in England. I do not want to contradict what was said by the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), but if he is trying to impose that on England, he is talking nonsense. To go against our traditional county structure is to strike a death blow at rural England.

Mr. Lidington: I believe that my hon. Friend is correct in both his historical analysis and his understanding of the likely consequences of the regional agenda becoming reality.

Jim Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lidington: No. I must make some progress.

According to some estimates, tourism is now worth about £14 billion to the rural economy in England alone—that is, not counting the other nations of the United Kingdom. The foot and mouth epidemic, followed by the collapse of foreign visits after 11 September, has had a devastating impact on the industry. Many businesses have already gone under. There are nearly 300 fewer entries in the standard guide to bed-and-breakfast accommodation in England this year than there were last year. More than a quarter of owners who have survived say that they do not expect to recover fully until 2003 at the earliest. Yet the Minister's colleagues in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have been dithering for more than six months about whether to give the English Tourism Council responsibility for marketing England as a tourist destination. The tourism industry is still battling with enormous difficulties, yet because of Government delay and uncertainty the ETC has no marketing budget, no timetable and no plan.

Tourism, like many other sectors of commerce, will in future have to rely more and more on fast, good-quality electronic communication with its customers. That means access to broadband. People have made the point to me again and again, from Northumberland to Cornwall: without access to broadband, new micro-businesses in the countryside will be at a permanent disadvantage compared with their urban competitors.

There are issues related to the number of subscribers needed to make broadband economic. I know that British Telecom says that between 200 and 750 would be necessary, but according to other studies as few as 40 might constitute a viable threshold. The broadband link in Cumbria runs underneath Penrith so surely it cannot be right that businesses in that town are denied a connection altogether. Britain now has one of the lowest rates of broadband take-up anywhere in the OECD area, and our rural businesses above all stand to lose out because of the delay. I believe that Government action to tackle the problem—to increase availability of broadband and provide incentives for its provision in rural areas—would command strong cross-party support in the House.

People need somewhere to work in the countryside. They also need somewhere to live, and rural homes are becoming less affordable. According to the Countryside Agency, nearly two thirds of people living in rural areas would need to spend more than half their incomes on mortgages to buy an average home. Part of the answer certainly lies in the provision of more homes, and the great merit of the policy announced last week by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) is that it would provide funds to pay for perhaps as many as 13,000 new homes every year nationwide.

Clearly there would be a need for particular measures, as exist in the present legislative system whereby small estates in small village communities are subject to particular arrangements.

Mr. Todd: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to develop that point. In the tiny hamlet of Thurvaston in south Derbyshire, three housing association homes were recently constructed by agreement with the local landowner. I can tell the hon. Gentleman for free that if those were made available for sale, they would rapidly disappear and not be replaced. How does he intend to address that kind of problem?

Mr. Lidington: There are a number of ways in which we intend to address the problem that the hon. Gentleman has rightly identified. First, there will undoubtedly remain a strong case for having an exceptional arrangement for designated small rural communities as currently exists under the present law. Whether the limit should remain as it is under the current arrangements is a matter on which my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden is consulting the interested bodies.

Secondly, there is the need not just to provide only accommodation to rent, but accommodation for shared ownership. That proposal has been made to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden by the Rural Housing Trust, and he is discussing it with the trust and other parties.

The point that the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) has overlooked is that the chief complaint by those who have objected to the right to buy in the past has been that tenants had the right to purchase their house but that the money received by the local authority could not then be used to provide additional housing. The Opposition are now committed to a policy that will free housing associations to spend the receipts from the sale of those housing association properties on the provision of new homes. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman made a serious point that deserves a serious answer.

The trouble with the arguments put forward by Labour Members is that they are trying to conceal the fact that they remain instinctively hostile not just to

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what my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden proposed last week, but to the whole notion that tenants should be enfranchised and have the right to buy their own homes. If the Minister for Rural Affairs or the Under-Secretary is prepared to stand up and say, not just to this House but to the tenants of housing associations throughout the country, that the Labour party remains adamantly opposed to tenants being granted the right to buy, my hon. Friends and I will be glad to take that message back and campaign on it in counties and cities throughout this land.

I am glad that it was the hon. Member for South Derbyshire who intervened earlier, because I said that while part of the problem was that we needed to provide new homes, we must also make sure that the homes were in the right places. I want to refer to something that the hon. Gentleman has said in the past. The Government's top-down approach is wrong. The Deputy Prime Minister seems to be rushing to concrete over great swathes of southern England and, in the process, is planning to build large new estates in some areas that are already relatively low cost. Surely we need instead a policy that begins with a sensible analysis of local need.

The Rural Housing Trust argued in a paper earlier this year for the provision of six to eight subsidised homes in each of 8,000 small villages throughout England—roughly 50,000 more homes in total—but sited in places where there was a proven local need that the local community would accept. I do not want to embarrass the hon. Member for South Derbyshire too much but I was impressed by an exchange that he had in the Select Committee on 21 November last year with a senior executive of the Countryside Agency.

The hon. Member for South Derbyshire acknowledged that an over-rigid approach to planning guidance, and particularly to PPG13, was tending to focus development exclusively in so-called key settlements, with a lot of smaller communities being, in his words, "effectively preserved in aspic" and therefore becoming more exclusive and less sustainable over time. I hope that the Government will look seriously at their planning guidance in light of our experiences as a country and at the sort of problems that the hon. Gentleman has rightly identified.

Jim Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lidington: No. The hon. Gentleman had one intervention about his front gate. I do not want a tour around his entire garden.

The rural economy is about a lot more than farming but farming still lies at its heart. Agriculture is not only important economically; farmers and growers are also custodians of a landscape that is valued by people in cities as well as villages and is a prime asset for our tourist industry.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the crisis in rural areas predates the election of the Labour Government? For instance, farm incomes were falling under the previous Conservative Government and the fuel tax escalator imposed an added burden on rural communities. Also, the one episode in particular that precipitated the crisis in the countryside would have to be the BSE disaster, over which his Government presided.

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman will know that most of the subjects that we are debating today are, in Scotland, devolved to the Scottish Parliament. However, I take his point seriously. I will not quibble about statistics; the historians can argue over those. I am willing, as is my party, to learn the lessons of our period in government. We can learn where we got things right and where we got them wrong. What we ask of the present Government is that they be prepared to learn from their experiences over the past five years when they have failed to deliver on the promises that they were so keen to make to people in our rural communities.

It is true that farm incomes, employment and investment have all plunged in the last few years. It is true that no Minister—not even one as benevolent as the Minister for Rural Affairs—can simply wish away the problems caused by international commodity prices, world competition and fluctuating exchange rates. But that makes it even more important that the Government act firmly and effectively on those matters that do lie within their own power.

Britain's farmers need a fair deal from current European negotiations. The best future for farming lies in moving towards a system where farmers are free to respond to what their customers want rather than to the edicts of Government, whether in Whitehall or in Brussels. It is right also to find ways to recognise the public good that farmers and growers provide for the nation in terms of landscape and biodiversity. Some of the key elements in Commissioner Fischler's proposals—such as the ceiling on payments and the idea of putting modulation receipts into a common European pot—seem to have been designed quite deliberately to discriminate against British agriculture. I hope that the Minister will say that the Government are determined to resist such discrimination.

There are many things that the Government could do now, without the need for international negotiations, to assist British agriculture. Top of that list must be, at last, some effective action against the illegal importing of meat. We know that the Government's assessment is that that was almost certainly the cause of the foot and mouth disaster. The Government are always lecturing farmers about the importance of biosecurity. It is about time that we saw the Government taking seriously their own responsibilities for biosecurity at our ports.

If one flies from London to Dublin, as I did last month, one finds when one arrives in Ireland a terminal plastered with posters warning that meat is not to be brought in. There is a disinfectant point, clearly signed, for travellers who have visited a farm or who are otherwise considered high risk. There is a large amnesty bin in which passengers can dump their ham sandwiches or whatever else they might have brought with them. All of these measures were introduced by the Irish Government in response to the epidemic here in 2001, even though there was only one case of foot and mouth disease on the island of Ireland.

When one returns to terminal 1 at Heathrow, one finds nothing. There are no bins, posters or disinfectant points. From written answers, we know that the number

of spot checks carried out at ports and airports is pitifully low and that there are still no clear lines of command between the different agencies that share responsibility for port controls.

We are now a year on from the last case of foot and mouth, and we are six months on from the Government's misnamed "action plan" on illegal meat imports. Their sloth and incompetence on this issue is nothing short of a disgraceful failure to carry out their public duty.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend has made that charge on his own account, but I should point out that when Professor Follett, who chaired the inquiry into the science of foot and mouth disease, was asked during today's Select Committee meeting what he would like to see following the Government's action plan, he replied "Action."

Mr. Lidington: My right hon. Friend demonstrates that the views that we are expressing on this matter command wide support in the country. People are experiencing a mixture of bafflement and anger at the Government's failure to act on a matter that they themselves have said is important.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): My hon. Friend mentions terminal 1 and flights from Ireland. Of course, a lot of the infected meat comes from Africa and the middle east, and at the Heathrow terminals that handle those flights there is no warning either.

Mr. Lidington: I hope that, if nothing else, after this debate Ministers will take the steps that they promised they would take six months ago, and ensure that fairly straightforward measures such as warning posters and amnesty bins are at last delivered.

Farmers want action on food labelling, too. Often, it is far too difficult for shoppers to find out whether the food that they buy is British and meets this country's stringent standards on hygiene and animal welfare. It is more than two years since the Prime Minister promised the National Farmers Union that he would introduce new labelling guidance to ensure that foreign goods are not passed off as British simply because they have been processed here. Yet the Government that he leads blocked a Bill, promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien), which tried to give that promise the backing of law. If the Government are not prepared to look again at this issue, we will look for an opportunity to bring the matter back for further debate.

Like other businesses, farmers are struggling day by day with the cost in time and money caused by Government regulation. Too often—far too often—new rules are being brought in with scant regard to their practical impact on people who are trying to run small businesses. European legislation on nitrates and on environmental impact assessments has been gold plated in Whitehall. Burying fallen stock on-farm will be illegal from May next year, yet the Government have still given us no details on how alternative arrangements are supposed to work, or on who will pay for them. At the moment, those farmers who live within reasonable distance of a hunt can get rid of livestock carcases; however, the Government have their own plans for that source of help as well. That problem is causing particular anxiety in upland areas. The subject was raised with me by the National Farmers Union in Wales and the Farmers Union of Wales when I met their representatives.

The 20-day rule on livestock movements in England and Wales is causing enormous practical problems for farmers. I remember attending the Hexham auction market—in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson)—and listening to sheep farmers. They said that they would have to choose between going to a ewe sale one week or a lamb sale the next, because it was impossible to do both.

Mr. Todd: Since the Chairman of the Select Committee referred to one thing that Sir Brian Follett said, perhaps I can refer to another. He was questioned on the 20-day movement restrictions, and referred back to the experience of restrictions on pigs. Again, he recalled outrage at the implications, said that that industry had accepted that that was the right thing to do, and rather suspected that the same view might be taken some years hence.

Mr. Lidington: If the hon. Gentleman refers to Sir Brian Follett's original report and to Dr. Anderson's report, he will find two further things. First, they recognised that there were profound differences between the structure of the pig industry and of the sheep and cattle sectors. Both men drew attention to the serious practical difficulties that they acknowledged would be caused, were the 20-day rule to be maintained. They also said that the Government should carry out an urgent cost-benefit analysis of the 20-day rule. Frankly, the Government have known since before those inquiries were set up that this was one of the big issues to be determined. That we are still waiting for the Government to reach a conclusion again indicates a complete unreadiness to face up to the difficulties that country businesses are experiencing.

Mr. Curry: There may be a case for one set of restrictions on movement, but of course we have two sets, because we have different systems north and south of the border. Does my hon. Friend think that, in Scotland, it is the sheep, the farmers or the politicians who are more intelligent than their counterparts in England?

Mr. Lidington: It is probably not among the sheep or the farmers where a difference in intelligence, or perhaps in judgment, exists. I have seen no hint from Ministers that farms in England or Wales are at risk of a renewed outbreak of foot and mouth disease because no border is being enforced between England and Scotland. Ministers have so far been unable to explain why a system in Scotland can exist alongside a completely different, far more stringent one south of the border.

What makes matters worse is the incompetence that the Government too often display in administering their own rules. The Rural Payments Agency could not meet its legal deadline for payments to cattle farmers, and we learned this week that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs still owes some £100 million to contractors that it employed to clean up farms infected

[Mr. Lidington]

with foot and mouth. The memory of the Government's mishandling of that epidemic still rankles with many thousands of people in our countryside. There was inadequate contingency planning, delay in calling in the Army, confusion over the contiguous cull and question marks over its legality. The experience of many people, particularly those in the areas hit hardest by the disease, was—to quote Cumbria county council's inquiry team—one of "confusion, disorder and delay".

How that contrasts with the vision painted in the Government's rural White Paper: a vision of

"a living, protected and vibrant countryside . . . one where people have access to the jobs and services they require . . . a countryside that can shape its own future, with its voice heard by Government at all levels."

That was a statement with which few could disagree, and it undoubtedly commanded widespread support in all parts of this country. That there is now such disillusion and discontent is above all down to the Government's blatant and repeated failure to deliver on the promises that they so glibly made.

8.18 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I am delighted that the Conservative party has at last woken up to the fact that the rural economy is an important issue. *[Interruption.]* It was noticeable that, in introducing the debate, the party's spokesman, the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), went very wide of the topics in the motion. I am glad that he quoted our purposes for the countryside—on which we are delivering—in his closing remarks. The Opposition are catching up with Labour's 180 rural and semi-rural MPs, whose pressure on their constituents' behalf since 1997 has led to the rural White Paper, to a raft of specific economic measures, to the rural service standard, and to the rural proofing of policies. The hon. Gentleman rightly referred to the latter, which was described as courageous by Ewen Cameron, the Government's rural advocate, from whom the hon. Gentleman quoted so selectively.

The hon. Gentleman was very selective in the way that he addressed even the issues covered in his own motion. The Government have acted to help rural businesses and the rural economy as a whole, not just farming. The hon. Gentleman referred to the recent march in London, so let me say to him what I said at that time. There was muddle at the heart of the march. The organisers were muddled. After the march, they had to produce a 10-point argument to explain why they organised a march in London. I received a small number of letters afterwards from people who took issue with the suggestion that there was a muddle at the heart of the march. Those who wrote said that they were not confused and that they knew why they had attended the march, but they all quoted different reasons for their presence. There was a muddle at the heart of the march.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Will the Minister give way?

Alun Michael: I shall give way with pleasure.

Mr. Gray: After the march, the Minister made some remark to the effect that he had no idea what it was all about and that it was all a muddle. Will he explain why the No. 10 lobby briefing of the next day presented a different case? It was stated then that the Prime Minister knew precisely what the march was about, that he was extremely concerned about the issues raised and that he would do something about them. Why is the Minister singing a different tune from the Prime Minister?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman is a shadow spokesman on economic issues but has apparently been left out of this debate, so I understand that he needs to make his voice heard at some point. However, if he had waited a moment he would have heard me say that most of the problems listed in the motion have not appeared since 1997 but have been building up over the past 25 years. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister responded courteously to the 10 matters listed by the Countryside Alliance after the march in September. Subsequently, I responded in great detail to each of the issues. I explained where the Government stood on them, and pointed out what we were doing about them.

The Countryside Alliance knows that we take the matter seriously, because we have given it a seat at the table—a place on the Rural Affairs Forum for England. To be fair to the alliance, I must say that it has worked constructively with the Government on a series of issues, but let us have no more nonsense suggesting that there was clarity behind the march.

In his opening speech, the hon. Member for Aylesbury rightly acknowledged that any sense of grievance is aimed not only at this Government but at all politicians. The real damage to rural economies—as with urban areas—was done in the 18 years of damage and neglect under Margaret Thatcher and John Major. *[Interruption.]* Of course Opposition Members do not like to hear that: throughout those 18 years, they tried to blame the previous Labour Government. Even 17 years into the Conservative Government's rule, they were still looking to the previous Administration. They will therefore be reminded of their faults and of the evils of the Conservative Administration.

The Labour party was the first political party to devote a national conference to rural issues, which all the interested parties attended. The National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association, voluntary organisations and the Countryside Alliance, as well as representatives of local government, animal welfare organisations and business, were there because they were able to debate with Labour MPs and Ministers the issues that affect rural economies.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Does the Minister accept that country people feel that they are losing their roots and tradition, and that they do not have enough impact on national affairs? When people in Lincolnshire are asked where they live, they say not that they live in West Lindsey or the east midlands but that they live in Lincolnshire. Why do the Government intend to proceed with a proposal that will abolish 1,000 years of English history? It will remove a golden thread running through people's lives. Before the Minister says that there will be a vote on the matter, I remind him that people in rural in Lincolnshire will be outvoted by

people in the big cities of Nottingham and Derby. Will he give those rural people some sort of veto? Why is he trying to abolish what they hold most dear?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman makes a rather delphic utterance. If he is referring to regional government, I can tell him that, since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly, rural interests and the rural economy in Wales have been more extensively debated in the Assembly, and especially in its Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. The Assembly has increased the level of interest and debate, and has also delivered a better standard of debate.

Jim Knight: The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said that people look to their county, district, borough and city councils, but he did not mention parish councils. Does not my right hon. Friend agree that parish councils are especially important in rural areas, and that this Government are acting to improve parish councils' powers and responsibilities?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I shall turn to the role of parish councils later in my speech. This Government are the first to focus on developing the role of parish councils, but Opposition Members have never understood that and, in government, they have never tried to do it.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I—and I am sure many other hon. Members—have received letters from parish councillors who, after years of loyal service to their communities, have resigned in disgust at the new regulations placed on them by the Government. How many such letters has the Minister received?

Alun Michael: The number is very small indeed, but I have received many letters from parish councillors around the country welcoming the way in which the Government are strengthening the role of parish councils. We have given those councils grants so that they have money to spend on matters such as transport and the development of parish plans. That allows parish councils to develop their role and to look after their communities' interests. A few Conservative parish councillors have stood down, and some people have been misled by incorrect information being circulated by a member of the Conservative party. The Government are working with parish councils, local government and the people who represent rural communities across the country.

Mrs. Browning: Why did the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 remove the right of parish councillors to nominate governors to local village schools?

Alun Michael: I am not going to develop education policy. I am talking about the role of parish councils and how the Government are enabling them to take the lead in their communities so that they can develop answers to local problems.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury had quite a bit to say about farming. There are genuine, serious and deep-seated problems in that sector, which have been developing for years. Under this Government, those problems are being tackled comprehensively for the first time. It is widely recognised that the Curry commission on the future of farming and food has given the answer to the problems faced by the farming industry. We are putting in £1.7 billion through the England rural development programme. Help is being provided on a variety of matters, including diversification and marketing. A direct comparison can be made: this Government are making available £240 million a year, compared with the £56 million a year made available between 1993 and 1999.

It is vital, however, that we secure effective reform of the CAP, and drive modernisation in the farming industry. Reform is needed to make our agriculture more competitive and more sustainable, and to ensure that our rural economies can flourish despite the challenges ahead.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: The Minister mentioned the Curry report. Many would agree that it was very sensible. Sir Donald Curry said that the farming industry would need £400 million a year, but the Government have offered £200 million in two years' time.

Alun Michael: No, that is a misinterpretation. The figure for the third year of the spending review alone is £200 million, and £500 million is the overall figure.

The Government are working with the farming industry to deliver on the Curry report. The Opposition may say now that that is common sense, but no previous Government have adopted such a comprehensive approach. It was a courageous step to take.

The food and farming sector makes an economic contribution, but farming also has a role to play in the countryside in respect of the landscape. We all value our landscape, but farmers, given that they manage some 77 per cent. of UK land, make a significant contribution to protecting the rural environment.

Pete Wishart: Does the Minister agree with the Secretary of State for Scotland, who described farmers as subsidy junkies?

Alun Michael: Many farmers accept that there is a serious point to be made about the extent to which farming has become dependent on subsidy instead of becoming competitive and effective. I and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs meet farmers all the time, and we have detected a remarkable shift in attitude. The shift took place in part during the foot and mouth outbreak, when people realised how vulnerable the industry was. Many matters were brought to a head at that time. We need to move away from a culture of subsidy in the farming industry, and towards a culture that assists the industry to be competitive. In addition, the agri-environment schemes are designed to pay for things that provide a public good.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the Minister explain how the British dairy industry can be 30 per cent. more efficient than the dairy industry on the continent, yet can be underpriced continually by that industry? Supermarkets can buy milk from France and

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

Ireland, for instance, at prices lower than those charged by our dairy industry. Are there not both institutional and fiscal reasons for that? Do not the Government need to do more work on the euro and commodity prices to ensure that our farmers are truly competitive? Is not it wrong for the Minister to blame farmers for not being able to face the market, when the Government are closing the gates to that market?

Alun Michael: There have been problems for many years in the milk industry—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It is a supply and demand problem.

Alun Michael: Indeed. One difficulty is that co-operatives in continental countries are far stronger than those in this country. A point stressed by the Curry report, and one that I strongly applaud, is the need to strengthen the co-operative culture so that farmers can take a greater part of the shelf price, which goes back to the primary producers. We strongly support that element of the Curry report—recognising the need to strengthen the requirements on competition.

Countryside stewardship and environmentally sensitive areas, the two main agri-environment schemes, are delivering more than £100 million a year to maintain and enhance the rural environment. The schemes have 26,000 agreement holders and cover about 1 million hectares—almost 10 per cent. of agricultural land. I emphasise that we need to make use of the money that is being invested in agriculture to reform farming and to give it a sustainable future. The problems will not be solved overnight, but we are working on them with the industry.

The picture painted by the Conservatives is a travesty. A few days ago, the Prime Minister pointed out that our commitment to a future for farming means that more money is going into that industry than into all other industries put together. The industry is important; it is vital for our countryside, but we must put it in balance. The motion refers to the wider rural economy and rural communities—the real rural agenda. People in rural areas want the same things as people in urban areas: jobs, access to services, a good standard of schools and education, health services, transport, affordable housing and a secure future. They have the same aspirations as people in urban areas, but sometimes there is a different set of problems in respect of the delivery of those services.

In urban areas, it is often possible to target problems by measuring them at ward level, but it is difficult to do that in rural areas. Communities are dispersed and so are their problems. People who need help are often dispersed throughout largely prosperous areas.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Before the Minister moves away from farming, will he explain the implication of the extremely interesting statement that he has just made? Is he saying that the Government will reverse their policy on breaking up Milk Marque?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that we are encouraging the development of co-operatives; that is part of the Curry agenda and we strongly support it. I appreciate that he wants to take me back in my speech, just as his Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Aylesbury, wanted to evade the terms of the Conservative motion. We want to encourage co-operatives—small businesses, new businesses and entrepreneurship—to work together to improve the standard of living of people in rural communities.

As I have just pointed out, the problems for rural communities are extremely local. We have a large number of small communities; for example, there are about 8,000 parish and town councils. They are experiencing the impact of social and economic change. It is a fact of life that many people in rural communities also have access to supermarkets. They have the choice of shopping locally or in neighbouring towns or cities. It does not help to play politics with such issues.

The long-term social trends are difficult for rural communities. They present choices for local government and local people as well as for the Government. We are trying to enable people and communities to make those choices, which is why the work of the Countryside Agency is so important. Through the finance strands that we make available, the agency offers people a chance to take decisions about their futures at the most local level.

Mr. Curry: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is aware that one almost hidden countryside industry is the care of the elderly. The local residential home may be the largest employer in many villages. Is he aware of the pressure being put on the sector because of local authority difficulties in funding care? What representations has DEFRA made in the name of joined-up government to the Deputy Prime Minister's Department about funding super-sparsity in rural areas and assisting sectors on which many people depend for part-time employment, not least to buttress agricultural incomes?

Alun Michael: I shall develop those points in a moment. We are working with colleagues throughout the Government, especially in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, to consider the needs of rural areas. Indeed, my right hon. Friend is taking a personal interest in issues such as the need for affordable housing in rural areas.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) makes very well the point that I was coming to: if we are to help rural economies, we have to understand them. I spent most of today with the Countryside Agency, which plays a vital role in this field. The agency rightly made the point that to maintain and extend the significant contribution that rural economies make to the UK economy—they benefit not only themselves but the wider economy—requires better engagement with those business sectors that make the most important contributions to rural economies.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury referred to farming and I have responded because it is important. However, almost 80 per cent. of the 5.22 million employees in rural workplaces work in four broad industrial groups about which we have heard nothing: for example, distribution, hotels and restaurants. Nowadays, more people in the

rural economy are employed in tourism than in farming. People work in public administration, education and health—the sector to which the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon referred. They work in manufacturing, banking, finance and insurance. The pattern is repeated in 65 per cent. of rural economies or 95 of the 145 rural local authority areas. We need to pay more attention to their economic footprint on rural England. Sometimes, that may not happen because such employment is also dominant in many urban districts, but it is also part of the positive and necessary engagement with farming.

It is important, for example, that in some of our most beautiful landscapes—our national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty—we also engage with the local economy and community, so that they can truly be test-beds for sustainable development and that they do not turn into landscape museums.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My right hon. Friend makes an important point. It is not only in respect of housing that the planning system is desperately in need of reform. In the countryside, we have the capacity to regenerate rural areas because there are many vacant or under-used buildings—usually farm buildings. I am sure that my experience is shared by many hon. Members: there is often great conflict between those who want to develop such buildings and those who want to pickle them in aspic—to use the words of my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd). We have to make people understand that if they want the countryside to live we must develop those buildings. I hope that changes to the planning system will allow that to happen.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is right. I am pleased about the interest shown by my noble Friend Lord Rooker, who deals with housing. He will attend the next meeting of the Rural Affairs Forum to debate the issue with representatives and colleagues. At the forum's last meeting, one of his officials was present to hear the views of people across the board, to ensure that those views are fed into the processes. There is no magic wand; what one person wants to do may have an impact on neighbours. The planning processes have to be followed with balance and care, but my hon. Friend is right to point up their importance.

We need to examine the potential for growth in rural communities. I have stressed the importance of the horse industry and have met its representatives on several occasions recently.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury referred to access to broadband. That, too, is important and I met BT for discussions about it earlier this month. However, it is essential to be precise about what we want it to do. Broadband is not a magic wand that will suddenly do away with problems in rural areas; it offers potential but it must be used with precision and planning.

Mr. Todd: My right hon. Friend briefly touched on the horse sector, and I saw one or two other hon. Members nod their agreement about its importance. That sector is clearly growing in my constituency, but, once again, it would be facilitated by a careful examination of the planning regime that applies to the development of not only the more serious horse enterprises, but those that provide more rough and ready leisure pursuits.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and we are working with the industry to identify what is needed to help it to expand.

The point that I am making strongly is that the Government are listening. We recognise that there are issues that need tackling to achieve our vision, which was so eloquently quoted by the hon. Member for Aylesbury, of a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside, but we are taking action and we have made considerable progress. We are committed to engaging and working with people in the countryside to develop solutions.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Before the Minister moves on from equestrian activities, may I tell him that a farrier came to see me at my advice session on Saturday because he was concerned, not surprisingly, about the impact of a possible ban on hunting? Nevertheless, I put it to him that the probable disappearance of hunting is likely to be associated with an expansion in equestrian activity when the stigma of it being linked to hunting is removed. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Alun Michael: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes, but I shall not expand on that topic during this debate, as I am sure that we will discuss it in the near future.

The Government are trying to govern for all the country. The rural economy is a part of the national picture. Effective national policies benefit everyone, irrespective of whether they live in rural or urban areas. Our economic policy has led to the United Kingdom having the lowest inflation rate in Europe and the lowest in this country for 30 years. That benefits the rural economy. We have the lowest long-term interest rates and mortgage rates for homeowners for 40 years. Unemployment in Britain is lower than at any time for 25 years. Some 1.5 million more jobs have been created, and long-term youth unemployment—once 350,000—is now just 5,000.

To those Opposition Members who wish to talk down the rural economy let me say this: unemployment is down 36 per cent. in rural areas, compared with a drop of 31 per cent. in urban areas. Rural areas have benefited massively from the drop in unemployment that the Government have achieved, and other national policies benefit rural areas, too. Putting schools and hospitals first, with the biggest ever sustained increases in public investment, help both the rural and urban economies. The adoption of the minimum wage has raised incomes in rural areas. Indeed, the benefits to low-paid people in rural areas are probably greater than to those in urban areas.

What about the Conservative party's record on school closures? Three rural schools a year have closed since 1997, and only five have closed since 2000. Between 1983 and 1997, the closure rate was 30 a year. I am not surprised that Conservative Members look embarrassed.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): My right hon. Friend mentioned the minimum wage. We hear much about

[Mr. Russell Brown]

falling farmers' incomes, but, earlier today at Prime Minister's questions, once again we heard an appeal, loud and clear, from the Opposition to abolish the Agricultural Wages Board. What good would that do to our rural economy?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. Such a decision would be extremely damaging, which is why Ministers have not supported it.

I want to look further at the question of essential services because people need to have access to high-quality public services no matter where they live. Let us consider affordable homes. Since 1997, the Government have doubled the funding for creating affordable homes to £1.2 billion a year, which is supporting the creation of 20,000 affordable homes every year. The Housing Corporation's rural affordable housing programme has also been doubled. We are ahead of the target set out in the rural White Paper. Restrictions on the right to buy in rural areas have helped, as has judicious use of planning powers by local authorities. We recognise that more needs to be done, but we are working in partnership with employers and public and private landlords. It is worth noting that, since 1997, 20 per cent. of social housing has been built in rural areas.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury may think that it was a clever ploy to suggest a change in the arrangements last week—he has wisely rowed back from what was said then—but the right to buy led to a loss of 91,000 homes from the social rented sector in rural areas between 1985 and 1990. That would be okay if those homes were being replaced, but it is hardly a blinding flash of inspiration to accelerate the loss. We need to ensure that affordable housing is there not just for the short term, but for the long term.

The question of choice and enabling people to have a decent start in life and being able to own their own homes is part of a wider picture, and there is no quick fix. The Rural Housing Trust, with which I have had discussions, and other organisations—charities, as well as housing associations—have a major contribution to make. It is worth making the point again that the target of 60 per cent. of new homes being built on brownfield land has been met eight years earlier than was forecast. The Opposition seem to suggest that there is some sort of threat to the greenbelt, but 30,000 hectares have been added to it since 1997.

Let us consider health and social services. By 2004, there will be 100 new primary care, one-stop or mobile units, 5,000 intermediary care beds in rural areas, and guaranteed access to primary care within 24 hours and a doctor within 48 hours. NHS Direct is now available throughout England, and it is having an even greater impact in rural areas than in urban areas.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Minister is talking about access to doctors. Is he aware that my constituency has the fourth largest ratio of patients to GPs in the United Kingdom, that some GPs are about to retire and that those services are beginning to approach crisis point? How can he make those brave boasts about increased access to GPs when the shortage of GPs is already a growing crisis around the United Kingdom?

Alun Michael: Has not the hon. Gentleman noticed that the Government are training more doctors and more nurses, so making available the people who will start to fill those gaps? We are trying to ensure that they can be recruited to provide the service in rural areas, as well as in urban areas. We are trying to deliver services for the whole population, not just for segments of it.

On post offices, there is a requirement to maintain the rural network. Net closures fell from 435 in 2000–01 to 210 in 2001–02 and we are working with local communities and local government to try to ensure that there is no loss from the network. As with shops, there is a challenge to local communities to choose to use facilities to ensure that they are viable and can be maintained.

We recognise the differential needs of rural and urban communities. For example, the new rural police fund has injected an extra £30 million in 2001–02 and 2002–03. The fund was based on research into the cost of providing a rural police service, rather than research into the level of crime. I can say with some pride that I commissioned the research on which that decision was taken when I was deputy Home Secretary.

Mr. Todd: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way once again and draw his attention to the experience in rural south Derbyshire, where a mobile police station, manned by two officers, has been dedicated to the task of working with rural communities, specifically farmers concerned about farm crime. I do not recall that service under the Conservative Government.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes his point very well indeed.

Throughout the country, I do not find that all the problems to do with fear of crime or those to do with housing or transport have been resolved, but people are more and more frequently saying, "Something has changed. Things are being done as a result of the Government's actions." For example, we have put £239 million over the three years of the spending period into public transport. We have 1,800 new or improved bus routes in England and 81 rural transport partnerships. We have created the formal presumption against closing rural schools, and only three schools have closed since 2001, compared to 30 between 1983 and 1997.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Will the Minister provide an assurance this evening that he will fight within the Government to ensure that the proposed changes in local government funding, which will have a direct impact on the amount of resources going to Lincolnshire and other shire counties, will not happen? Will he also fight within Government against Home Office proposals to change the way in which police authorities are funded in rural areas, to ensure that there are no cuts in Lincolnshire or other shire counties?

Alun Michael: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am bringing to the attention of colleagues across

Government the needs of rural communities, and that we are discussing these matters sensibly. I must tell him, however, that anybody who has had experience of formulae, and of what happens when any formula is changed, whether in relation to local government, the police service or health—I have had experience of all three—will know the complexities involved and the unintentional outcomes when one seeks to make such changes. It is a difficult, delicate issue that does not get easier as time goes on.

I have illustrated that, in a series of areas, we have brought rural policy into the centre of government. The commitment on rural issues is reflected in central Government by the creation of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with the specific aim of achieving thriving rural economies and communities, bringing new focus and drive to the Government's policies for rural England. The establishment of the Countryside Agency, with a budget of some £90 million a year, is helping to deliver integrated and sustainable rural policy. It delivers important programmes combining social and community interests with economic and environmental needs, such as the vital villages and market towns initiatives, and has piloted innovative schemes to ensure that rural people get the services that they need.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster) *rose—*

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) *rose—*

Alun Michael: I have spoken for some time and have given way repeatedly to Opposition Members. I think that I need to make a little progress to allow other Members on both sides of the House to enter the debate.

We are helping local groups to make the connection between their needs and opportunities, such as that developed by my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) with the local parish council—runners-up in the local parish council of the year award—in Waters Upton. Shop and pub closures have been recognised as issues with which local people need to engage. A recent pub closure led to a telling comment from the landlord, who said, "The problem is that I have trade during the summer when we have visitors and walkers in the area, but local people are not using the pub." The challenges are therefore not only for Government but for local communities in the choices that they make.

The Government are listening to the real concerns of rural people to find solutions, and are working with people on those solutions. We have set up the Rural Affairs Forum for England, which I chair, which works with representatives of all strands of rural opinion, giving rural people a voice at the heart of government. Every region has its own rural affairs forum with representation on the national forum, and sub-groups deal with specific issues such as tourism and urban-rural linkages. Next month, in conjunction with the forum, we are holding a rural conference for the first time to discuss the interdependence between towns and countryside. Opposition Members should work with us to try to recreate linkages and understanding between urban and rural areas rather than encouraging the idea of a divide.

We are not just listening; we are committed to working in partnership to achieve our aims. For instance, the "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" campaign was designed to assist rural communities to recover this year after the impact of foot and mouth disease. We are also working with the Countryside Alliance on its "Food Fortnight". We can work with all sorts of people to improve the economy and the quality of life in rural areas. We need to reconnect rural people with urban people, however, because we need each other. We need to get rid of the talk of urban-rural divides.

As I said earlier, we appreciate and value the contribution that parish councils make to local democracy, but they can do more. We are committed to giving them a greater role in leading and invigorating their communities. The quality town and parish council scheme will give country towns and villages more scope to shape their future and make local government in the countryside more responsive to local needs. We provided £2 million to help establish a national training and support strategy for towns and parish councils. I am very pleased to hear the responses from the Local Government Association, the National Association of Local Councils, and parish councillors up and down the country, such as those whom I met recently in the Forest of Dean and west Lancashire. We seek to work with parish councils to enhance their role. The message is getting through and it is making a difference.

There are many example of how people in rural areas can take a grip of, and improve, their future. The vital villages project and the information provided by the Countryside Agency show how we can work with the agency and local government to improve the quality of life. Major challenges face rural communities along with those of maintaining a positive quality of life and the environment that is so valued. We are taking action to address the problems that exist and many improvements can be seen, although more needs to be done. We are committed to working with all those who share the Government's vision for the countryside and will empower communities to develop local solutions.

8.56 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): This is an important debate, but it will be short and I fear that not many Members will be able to participate. Indeed, at one point, I thought that we would go straight from the Front-Bench speeches to the wind-ups.

I am astonished that the Tories should choose to debate the rural economy, given their record in government. It is worth recording what they did to it. They started by cutting independent agricultural research and compromised advice for their own policy. As a result of that, they presided over a series of catastrophic disasters in farming and the rural economy. They cut the number of government scientific offices and of vets. We then found ourselves with the catastrophe of BSE, which they were slow to acknowledge and to respond to. Indeed, they tried to cover it up until it was impossible to conceal the scale of the disaster that we faced.

Not only that, at a time when farmers faced the adverse effects of the exchange rate, the Tories consistently refused to pass on the full agrimonetary

[Malcolm Bruce]

compensation to which farmers were entitled. The Tories consequently contributed to the depression of farm incomes.

David Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Malcolm Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to finish my description of this catalogue of disasters? The Tories sold off affordable housing in rural areas—we have debated that—and they now want to flog off the rest as their contribution to the viability of rural economies. They completely failed to acknowledge that their wholesale privatisation programme and the centralisation of services withdrew services and jobs from, and undermined the viability of, rural communities.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West) *rose—*

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire) *rose—*

Malcolm Bruce: The Tories withdrew bus services under bus regulation, accelerated post office closures and withdrew health services into the city. That is the catalogue of disaster in 18 years of Tory government, and they have the cheek to come here with a bleeding-heart resolution expressing their concerns about the rural community that they destroyed.

David Taylor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could have added to that sorry catalogue of evidence the fact that, of the massed ranks of the 166 Members in the parliamentary Conservative party, only six are in the Chamber for their debate. Fewer than 4 per cent. of their number are here, so 96 per cent. of the parliamentary Tory party should be ashamed of themselves.

Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman makes his point perfectly fairly. The point I make, however, is not that the Conservatives have been out of power for five years and can now make a fresh start, but that most of the damage that has been inflicted on the rural economy was inflicted by the failures, the mismanagement and misbegotten policies of the Conservative Government. It is astonishing that they should now wish to come along as knights in shining armour in a bid to say that they are the saviours of the rural community.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The hon. Gentleman paints an interesting picture, but how does it correspond with what has happened under the Ministry for Environment and Rural Development in Scotland? Under its Liberal Democrat management, average farm incomes have declined to a greater degree in Scotland than in England and Wales. In fact, ministerial time has been taken up with a Bill to ban fur farming when there are no fur farms in Scotland.

Malcolm Bruce: The hon. Gentleman, who as the only Conservative MP in Scotland is himself an endangered species, should know that the Minister in Scotland has been acknowledged as standing up for rural communities and Scottish farmers, with whom he has a good relationship. In particular, he handled the foot and mouth crisis with considerable acuity and distinction, and rather more effectively than the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I have a great deal of confidence in him. I am not alone in that. I have heard the National Farmers Union and other environment agencies in Scotland sing his praises in meetings because of his competence and commitment to fighting for the rural community.

On farm incomes, I repeat that the exchange rate is the biggest single factor in the decline in farm incomes in the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman's party will not address that and it refused to provide the agrimonetary compensation to protect farm incomes. The Conservatives could have done that and, because they did not, are more responsible for the drop in farm incomes than even the Labour party.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis of how much of the farming industry has reached this point, but he cannot wash his hands of his party's responsibility in Wales and Scotland, where it has been part of a coalition and where, as it happens, it is responsible for agriculture in both countries. Does not he think it uniquely ironic that his motion states

"that British agriculture"—

which I assume includes Wales and Scotland—

"is in the throes of its worst recession since the 1930s"?

What role has his party played in that?

Malcolm Bruce: I have just explained that the prime reason for the recession in agriculture is the exchange rate. That is the biggest single factor. The hon. Gentleman might not be aware that the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly do not have control of the exchange rate. The Westminster Parliament and the Whitehall Government do, but they will not make a decision that will resolve the problem because the Prime Minister is too scared to face up to it.

The Conservatives have a brass neck and a cheek to come up with the motion, which sticks in the throat. Most people in beef-producing rural areas such as mine still have fixed in their minds the picture of the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) feeding his daughter hamburgers while he assured us that there was no problem with British beef—when, in fact, there was a catastrophic problem with it. They will not forget what the Tories did to our beef industry.

The Minister made a long speech, but he gave no clear idea of the results delivered by a Labour Government to turn the situation around. Labour continued to run down the number of scientific officers and vets when it came to power. That is only now being reversed, but the number has not climbed back to where it needs to be. The Government mismanaged the foot and mouth epidemic and refused to hold a public health inquiry. All they did was introduce draconian measures in the Animal Health Bill, which they tried to force it through Parliament. The other place rightly delayed it because the measures were unjustified, unnecessary and, in many cases, vindictive, and they did nothing to secure co-operation between Government and farmers to deal with the problem of epidemics.

The Secretary of State is not here. I am not complaining; I merely point it out. I criticise her most specifically on this matter. She loses few opportunities to

talk about reform of the common agricultural policy, but she does so in a way that shows a complete lack of consideration of the dire state of farm incomes. We all want a reform that ensures that the continual subsidisation of production is replaced by more beneficent measures. However, the Secretary of State seems to imply—the Secretary of State for Scotland has also been accused of this—that farmers are subsidy junkies. In reality, farmers are looking for an income that bears a correlation to their costs of production.

Most farmers I talk to would be happy to live in an environment without subsidies if the price paid at the farm gate related to their costs of production. There is no correlation at the moment, and it is one reason why all major agricultural systems in the world have some form of subsidy. When the Secretary of State talks about reform, she often does not realise how concerned farmers are that all she wants to do is to cut the subsidies that they still have, in spite of the fact that their average income has dropped to about £7,000 a year. That is not a viable proposition.

I repeat that the Government have underestimated the scale of the exchange rate's impact on farm incomes and business. They have not given the full agrimonetary compensation that was available, and they have continued to dither about what we should do about the exchange rate. This party has been clear in its views, and certainly an early decision to join the euro, subject to a referendum for the British people, would do more than any other measure to restore the incomes of the farming community. In any case, whether one is for or against the euro, what is needed in every sector of the economy is a decision, rather than the Prime Minister leaving the British economy to dither and struggle year after year because he does not have the confidence or leadership to face up to the issue.

As I have mentioned, I represent a mixed agricultural community, which apart from being a prime quality beef-producing area is also a pig area, a sheep area and an arable area. However, beef has been the flagship of the north-east of Scotland, and we are still suffering under export regulations negotiated by the Government to secure the chimera of the legal lifting of the ban, whereas in reality we all know that it is pretty impossible to sell British beef abroad because we are over-regulated. [*Interruption.*] The Under-Secretary is muttering. I say to him that companies and producers that had a large export market for prime Scotch beef are unable even to consider rebuilding it, because the regulations that we have imposed on ourselves to secure the lifting of the ban make it impossible, on grounds of practicality and cost, to deliver a product at the quality and price necessary to build up such a market.

The serious point that I make to Ministers is that with BSE incidence rising in France and Ireland, although not yet to UK levels, which are falling, surely there will come a time in the not-too-distant future when an EU-wide regime will apply fairly and evenly across the whole market and a genuine single market will be re-established for beef and beef exports. An Italian beef importer, rejoicing in the name of Mrs. Francesca Piccolini, was a major importer of quality Scotch beef before the ban was imposed and says that she has scoured the world to look for a replacement product of comparable quality and has been unable to find anything as good. Yet she still cannot get back into the market because she cannot get quality at a realistic price. The Government should address that issue in the hope that, in two or three years, we can once more have a single market in beef and other meat products.

In the long speech by the Minister for Rural Affairs there were many references to initiatives, targets and White Papers, many promises and many indications of additional money here and there, but ultimately the Government will be judged on delivery. Right now, the rural economy does not see that delivery. People will judge the Government by the outcomes, and although I made it clear that the root of the problem was 18 years of mismanagement by the Conservatives, the Government have certainly not rebuilt confidence or solved the problems faced by rural areas. That is why, in spite of the lateness of the hour and the shortness of the debate, the fundamental question for the political parties is: who has the necessary vision to address the issues facing rural communities?

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that some of that rebuilding is very difficult because of the factors to which he adverted? Among other things, selling off care homes and privatising British Telecom, which made broadband provision much more difficult, have made it more difficult for us to climb out of the mess that we were left than if we had been given a reasonable shot.

Malcolm Bruce: That is a perfectly fair point; I will not take issue with it. I am saying, however, that excuses will not ultimately impress the voters. They want results; we have to deliver results. We as a party have sought to address some of the issues and to start to develop policies that we believe will begin to rebuild confidence in the economy. We have a vision of a rural economy that promotes harmony with the environment but recognises the varying and important contribution that the countryside makes to the whole economy; and, indeed, which ends the urban-rural divide, which is not constructive. We have a number of measures that would go some way towards achieving that.

I will not labour the point other than to say that it remains our view that joining the euro as soon as is practicable and subject to a referendum would help to secure a competitive market in the CAP. As long as we remain outside the euro, we shall be increasingly disadvantaged. That is an indisputable fact for agriculture whatever the relevance of the euro to other sectors of the economy. We happen to believe that the euro would benefit the whole economy.

We recognise that we need to diversify the strength of the rural economy—the income not only of agriculture but of other activities. We want to encourage and promote co-operatives, as the Government have said they recognise. We want to promote marketing initiatives that will help to secure diversification, adding value to and diversifying farm produce, boosting tourism and attracting new businesses. That requires practical measures of support—certainly in finding new investment.

Mr. Drew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Malcolm Bruce: No, I am anxious that others should be able to make some contribution to the debate.

[Malcolm Bruce]

One area worth exploring is whether rural communities can secure a direct stake in the resources that they provide for the whole community. I have in mind things such as the water supply, which at the moment is owned by privatised water companies that have their own shareholders and do not cut the community into the benefits. The Minister for Rural Affairs knows perfectly well that that is an issue of sharp political focus in Wales, especially north Wales, dating back 50 years or more. My argument is not that the residents of Liverpool, Birmingham or Manchester should not benefit from Welsh water, but that the Welsh people should receive some benefit in direct revenue accruing from that. We should consider community ownership or a community share, certainly for new developments. The former leader of the Liberal Democrats, now Lord Ashdown, long argued that a mutual stake in such services had much to commend it.

We have the proposed expansion of renewable energy sources, such as wind farms and others. I recently witnessed with the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and the all-party parliamentary group on renewable and sustainable energy the encouragement of the German authorities in order to ensure that communities secured an ownership in wind turbines. That had two benefits. First, it meant that the community could see an income flow rather than just an outside business developing and exploiting their resource. Secondly, with indicative planning, it helped to remove people's fear that wind turbines would be spread all over the landscape without any regard to bird migration, scenic beauty, scientific interest or, indeed, over-development. If rural communities are to be exploited in order to provide resources for the wider community, I strongly commend to the Government a sensitive planning regime and the opportunity for revenue to accrue directly to the community. I want the Government to consider whether there are ways of exploring that.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) made mention of broadband, as did the Minister. Whenever the issue is raised with the Government, the standard ministerial reply is that they have had discussions with BT. With the greatest respect, I must tell the Minister that people are looking for a little more than that. They want some commitment to ensure that broadband will be available.

The problem is potentially rather more severe than the hon. Member for Aylesbury set out. Lack of broadband access will not only stifle the development or attraction of new businesses in rural areas but threaten the continuing survival of those already located there. If they cannot access broadband, many will have to move to a place where they can. I suggest that the matter requires more than Ministers having conversations with BT. There should be a Government policy to try to ensure the drawing down of broadband to rural communities and the delivery of the service in the long run.

Rural proofing has been mentioned as something that the Government talk about, but to be honest it does not test very well. Indeed, the Countryside Agency is not that impressed. There are a number of problems. The costs of providing services in rural areas tend to be higher and the funding of local authorities and other public agencies does not fully take account of that.

A specific issue that has had an impact in my constituency is small rural schools. They are an important part of the fabric of the rural community, but if the rebuilding or modernisation of those schools is a serious issue and the Government's response is, in essence, that the only way to fund the work is through PFI, there is a problem. To be frank, rural schools are of no interest to private developers, so PFI could lead to the forced closure of rural schools, to be replaced by larger schools covering a wider area.

Pete Wishart: The Liberal Democrats are in government in Scotland.

Malcolm Bruce: It is not happening in Scotland—well, it is in some parts of Scotland, but not where Liberal Democrats are in charge, because we consult local people and we have clearly stated that we will not close schools against the wishes of the local people. The one school in my constituency that has closed since Labour came to power, a school in the Moray council area, was closed by a Labour chairman of education and the closure was sanctioned by a Labour Minister, against the expressed wishes of the local community.

Mr. Peter Duncan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Malcolm Bruce: No.

Further issues relating to services in rural areas include the provision of further education, training within rural communities, and outreach clinics. As for the Post Office, it is somewhat ironic that the Government decided to force the transfer of benefit payments from post offices to banks and credit transfers to cut the costs of the former Department of Social Security, now the Department for Work and Pensions, but now have to find an almost exactly similar sum to support post office services. It makes one wonder whether they would have done better to leave well enough alone. Finally, advice centres in rural areas are difficult to fund and often face closure, leaving people having to travel to advice centres in towns up to 50 miles away.

Another important and much debated issue is that of affordable housing in rural communities. Local authorities and housing associations clearly need freedom to invest in housing, and planning guidelines must be revised. In addition, I suggest ending the second home council tax rebate and using the revenue to allow local authorities and others to fund new housing development to meet the requirement for affordable housing. It is interesting that the Tories are so keen to sell off the remaining housing association stock at a discount: it is Mickey Mouse economics to believe that one can continue to sell at a discount and the money will not run out. I wonder whether the Conservatives would be so enthusiastic if the same rule applied to privately rented accommodation in rural areas. If such properties were sold off at a discount to tenants, it would make a huge contribution to the welfare of rural communities. I suspect that such a policy would not be greeted with warm support from the Conservatives, but I think it a better policy than theirs.

As I am happy to acknowledge, there is strong political competition for rural votes. Many constituencies in rural areas are marginal, with some having only recently become so. Some Labour Members have been astonished to find themselves representing rural constituencies, and on occasion their astonishment shows. A lot of Conservatives are no longer in Parliament because they no longer represent rural areas, whereas there is a swelling rank of Liberal Democrats who have built up their strength: more than half our constituencies are rural. Major factors in our success have been the discredited policies of the Tory Government and rural people's lack of conviction about Labour's competence and understanding of rural issues.

I suggest that the complexion of the House of Commons after the next general election will to a substantial extent be determined by how the parties tackle rural issues. We Liberal Democrats are determined to be out in front in that respect—indeed, we already are. At our party conference in Brighton, we adopted as a blueprint for policy development our radical "Rural Futures" paper, which bears reading.

While the Tories, by their own admission, have no policies, and Labour continues to send a discordant message, we, the Liberal Democrats, are determined to establish our party as the natural party of the countryside.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I call Ian Cawsey.

Mr. Pickthall: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether there is anything that Mr. Speaker's good offices could do to prevent a disgraceful situation whereby the amount of time available to Back-Bench Members is likely to be reduced to about 20 minutes if we are lucky?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not strictly a point of order for the Chair. The time given to Front-Bench speeches is entirely a matter for Front Bench speakers.

9.20 pm

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): Having listened to that exchange, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall either reduce the number of points that I make or speak faster—in reality, a bit of both.

I intend to speak about the rural economy and public services in rural areas. Many measures are used to establish how well an economy is going and to prove a point one way or the other. In my judgment, one of the best measures has always been that of how many people are in work. If the economy is going well, people have jobs. When it is not, unfortunately people do not have jobs. I represent one of the largest rural constituencies in England. Since Labour came to power, we have enjoyed a 41 per cent. fall in unemployment. That has taken the unemployment level down to 3 per cent. We are very pleased about that, of course.

The Opposition, in moving the motion, are commenting on the state of the rural economy. In the constituency of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), unemployment has fallen by 49 per cent. since Labour came to power. In the constituency of the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), it has fallen by 32 per cent. In the constituency of the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), it has fallen by 42 per cent. It has fallen by 29 per cent. in the constituency of the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) and by 43 per cent. in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean). In the constituency of the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) it has fallen by 29 per cent. Whatever problems there are—and no one could deny that there are problems—things have become better since Labour came to power.

The motion refers to difficulties in agriculture that are real and ongoing. The hon. Member for Aylesbury fairly said in his opening remarks that they cannot all be put at the feet of the present or any other Government. But rural economies, like all economies, are dynamic. They must adapt and change to respond to different circumstances. I am pleased that in my constituency many of those involved in agriculture have diversified, modernised and considered other ways to run a business in their locality, and have since been successful.

Reference has been made to the Curry report, "The Future of Farming", which, broadly speaking, has received a good welcome throughout the House. There has been some talk about the funding that will come on board. However, it is worth bearing in mind the fact that many funding streams are already available for those in the rural sector. Only the other month, I was at Moore's farm, one of the largest farms in the south part of the Isle of Axholme in my constituency, opening its new plant and modernised equipment, which had in part been paid for through grant aid given by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I know that that support was well received.

Councils can make a difference through their support. North Lincolnshire council, which serves the south part of my constituency, was successful in obtaining single regeneration budget funding—under SRB6. As a suggestion, which came in part from the local National Farmers Union, the council decided to put some of that money into the rural area represented by it to help people in agriculture who needed to diversify into other parts of business. That, plus the rate relief on rural businesses that the Government introduced, has made a real difference.

I make that point for two reasons. First, it is a success story in a rural area. Secondly, the same NFU made the same offer to the neighbouring council, which also had SRB money. That is a Tory council, North Lincolnshire being Labour. The Tory council refused the offer. Yet the Tories talk about problems in the rural economy. The money was available, the possibility was there, and the NFU was making the offer, but West Lindsey council said no. I say that because the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) made a short intervention earlier. He is no longer in his place, but I know that he will welcome the fact that unemployment has fallen by 35 per cent. in his constituency since Labour came to power.

It was helpful for many rural areas when the Government came to reassess the regional map to ascertain where we could tap into European funding. We broke down the areas that could be eligible. I represent Goole, which is not a rural area, but which has great deprivation problems. It could never get on to the map because it was surrounded by affluence. However,

[Mr. Ian Cawsey]

breaking down areas into council ward level allowed that to happen for the first time for Goole, and the marshlands, which are all the villages round it. They became eligible for assisted aid from Europe, which was welcome.

Mention has been made of regional development agencies. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) referred to the metropolitan areas of Yorkshire and Humberside. He, too, has left the Chamber. No doubt he will welcome the fact that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 49 per cent. since Labour came to power.

The right hon. Gentleman said that North Yorkshire was the only metropolitan area in Yorkshire and Humberside. I do not think that people in the East Riding of Yorkshire consider themselves metropolitan at all but they have managed to get significant funding through the regional development agency. They have also managed, through a local inquiry, to ensure that 200 acres of former agricultural land has been converted for industrial use to exploit the natural advantages of the area. The American company, Guardian, is building a large glass factory there that will employ hundreds of people, so I look forward to the 3 per cent. unemployment rate in my constituency falling still further. That will be an achievement due in part to what the Government have done.

Another successful scheme is the market towns initiative in Brigg. I am pleased that the Countryside Agency chose Brigg marketplace to advertise the market towns initiative in one of the excellent little newspapers that it sends us all from time to time. The picture showed my constituency office but the article did not state where it was, so I was a little disappointed at that, but in general terms it was nice to see Brigg being advertised in that way.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Government often promote the market towns initiative as providing £1 million per market town? In reality, the maximum is £300,000, and it is dependent on an awful lot of matched funding coming in from various sources. A couple of towns in my constituency have been granted market town initiative status, and I am glad of that, but the promotion gave the impression that they would get £1 million of public money. The reality is far from that.

Mr. Cawsey: I am grateful for that intervention. I never thought that my town would get £1 million, and I have never heard that before. If there is such a misapprehension, I am sure that the Minister would want to pick it up. I stress that the initiative in my constituency was never advertised as providing £1 million for the town. Nevertheless, it was good news. There is much to be done in the rural economy, but people sometimes try to pretend that it is all wrong, when there are good things as well.

I shall comment briefly on public services. I served as a county councillor for seven years and as leader of North Lincolnshire council for two years before coming to the House. There has always been the challenge of delivering public services in sparsely populated areas—for example, small schools service delivery. One of the things that we considered and eventually introduced in North Lincolnshire was the concept of local links out in villages—the idea that not just council services, but services provided by the jobcentre, colleges and other organisations can be based in one building, with a range of such bases across the villages, so that instead of always having to go to urban centres for help and support, people could get that out in the countryside. Those initiatives are now commonplace across our area and have proved to be enormously popular and successful.

North Lincolnshire council was a Labour council, and still is. It obviously was while I was leader. At the time when we proposed the local links scheme, the Conservatives on the council voted against it. They opposed it. They voted to keep all the council services in Scunthorpe, the major town of the area, and did not want anything to do with local links at all. We must ask ourselves who is talking about getting services into the countryside—the Labour party or the Conservative party?

On rural schools, so many classrooms have been built in my constituency since 1997 that I could bore the House endlessly with them. Let me tell the House about Alkborough, a lovely village. When we came to power, the school in Alkborough still had an outside toilet. Not only did we get rid of that very quickly, but we built two new classrooms in order to meet the class size pledge. When I went to the opening of those, there was a new foundation stone showing the year 2000, next to the one for the original building, which was from 1870-something. The head teacher at the time, Austin Holden, said, "We have these two foundation stones with 130 years between them, and no Government spent any money between those two dates, until this Government came along."

Jim Knight: Are any of my hon. Friend's schools getting new school halls? In my constituency just a year ago, three schools approached me, and now all three are on their way to getting new halls in the near future.

Mr. Cawsey: I am sure that that is the case. I hope to have a new school at Rawcliffe and another at South Ferriby.

There is much more that I could say about public services, but I am aware of the time and I know that others want to come in, so I shall give the final word in my little contribution to a local farmer, the chairman of one of the branches of my National Farmers Union. We were out together the other night in a joint enterprise to keep the British brewing industry going, and he said to me, "You know, Ian, I am not really all that bothered about politics". All hon. Members know that that is the lead-in to a constituent saying that he does not support them. He said, "I am not really bothered about politics, but when I was old enough to vote, I mentioned it to my granddad, who said, 'You are a farmer, son, so what you do is vote Conservative and pray that the Labour party wins.'"

Having watched the performance in the Chamber tonight, all the prayers and hopes must go to the Conservative party, because on this performance, the Conservatives do not have a prayer.

9.30 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey), especially as he has enlightened me somewhat about the market towns initiative. Hexham was a Labour target seat and the Labour party announced before the election that we would have £1 million as part of the initiative. On making inquiries, just as the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) did, we discovered that the amount put in was significantly less than £1 million. None the less, for target seats the stated amount was £1 million, and I still have the press release in my files to prove it.

It is right and proper for me to declare an interest as a consultant to the Countryside Alliance. I am proud to be a consultant to that organisation, which brought 407,791 people into London in the biggest demonstration ever seen in this city. Let me tell the Minister for Rural Affairs that there was certainly no muddle at the heart of the march. Presumably, he did not march, but I and many other colleagues did so and I can say that there was no such muddle. The muddle lies at the heart of DEFRA. It is fascinating that the Minister should describe his Ministry as one of focus and drive when I would regard it as wonderful if I could obtain answers to letters that I sent to Ministers many months ago. Let us forget the focus and drive, and have some answers to letters dealing with the problems that farmers have raised with me and other colleagues. The Ministry has a vastly long way to go before it can be called a Ministry of focus and drive.

The Minister's muddle was shown by the way in which he dealt with the role of the farming economy in the countryside. There is a continual misunderstanding about the fact that only half a million people are directly employed in agriculture and that its importance is small in terms of GDP. To see how the farming industry underpins the rural economy, however, we must consider what happened when foot and mouth struck in my constituency and Northumberland as a whole, in Cumbria and Devon and also in the seat of my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan). When foot and mouth struck, the whole rural economy came to a standstill, but it was not the precautions that brought other businesses either near or completely to bankruptcy. When the countryside is closed, the tourism industry and other businesses suffer hugely. The strength and importance of the farming economy in the countryside is underlined by those dreadful tragedies.

The Minister talked about farming incomes falling under the Conservatives, but he was completely wrong. In 1995, the income of British agriculture was £6 billion, but in 2000, the last year for which I have figures, it fell to £1.8 billion. That is a huge fall during the life of this Government.

Farm incomes in my constituency, which contains many upland farms, are under £5,000 a year. They are even lower in Scotland, where the Liberal Democrats are in coalition government, and I think in Wales, where there is also such coalition. The subsidy provided to an upland farmer in Cumberland will now be about £30,000 a year. The bleak logic is that it would be better for the taxpayer and possibly the farmer to strike a deal so the stock is slaughtered and they take half the subsidy each. They would be better off, but the uplands would suffer from not being farmed.

In a constructive spirit, I ask the Minister to consider a particular issue concerning farming and the rural economy: the confusion that now exists because of the plethora of different organisations that are involved in the countryside. There are pockets of money, but such organisations have different and often conflicting requirements. The plethora of organisations drives farmers to confusion, especially in upland locations that are sensitive environmental areas. That is incredibly confusing on top of all the regulations and other burdens that the Government have imposed on the farming community.

In the short time that remains, I want to consider the reform of the common agricultural policy. The Government have let farming down on that. I appreciate that Ministers are busy, but the reform is important. Ministers are happy to shuttle around the capitals of Europe to pursue matters that are interesting or important to the Government, but they make little effort to set about meaningful reform of the disastrous CAP.

Jim Knight: Does the hon. Gentleman not recall that when the Conservative party was in power, nobody in Europe listened to it? It was ignored on BSE, yet when the Labour Government held the European presidency, the Commission adopted our policy on CAP reform. We are making progress. I admit that it is slow, but at least our voice is heard in Europe, unlike that of the Conservative party.

Mr. Atkinson: A party can only be judged on results. The Government's results on reforming the CAP have so far been lamentable. Most of the reforms agreed in the medium-term review are potentially damaging to, for example, livestock farming. Proper reform, which Sir Donald Curry specified, is right. I hoped that the Government would pursue the recommendation of Sir Donald, who is a constituent of mine. However, they did not do that with any force.

Since the Government have been in power, they have gone to Brussels, banged the table and returned with less than they had. Every time they go to Brussels, they return with a disadvantage to British farming. Only yesterday, the Meat and Livestock Commission produced a report showing that the agreed proposals in the medium-term review of the CAP would mean a reduction of 17 million in this country's sheep flock and substantial reductions in our beef herd. That has been agreed.

It is no good Ministers coming to the House and claiming that they are fighting and batting for the British farmer: the British farmer simply does not believe it. A quick resolution of the CAP's future is vital. Every day, farmers must make decisions in a capital-intensive business about whether to buy more land or more machinery—whether to expand to survive or diversify. Yet their future remains unknown.

Will young men and women who want to go into farming do so if they do not know where their future lies? The Government must understand that farming is the bedrock of the rural economy and rural society. If farming does not emerge from the current depression, the future for the rural areas of this country is grim.

9.37 pm

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I welcome the opportunity to contribute briefly to the debate, and I thank Conservative Front-Bench Members for giving us such a useful platform.

Contrary to popular opinion, I represent a constituency that is partly urban and partly rural. I live in a small village outside the town and I love country sports, especially fishing and shooting. I was pleased to be recently appointed adviser to the Minister for Sport and the Minister for Rural Affairs on fishing and shooting. I shall speak later about the tremendous contribution of those important sports to the rural economy. However, another subject, to which other hon. Members have referred, needs further examination: the spurious town and country divide.

Many of the activities and tactics of the Countryside Alliance are objectionable, not least the lies and smears that it spreads about the Labour party's intentions for fishing and shooting and the failure of its stewards at the latest march and that held a few years ago to prevent the British National party from distributing racist, fascist and prejudiced literature. Not a single Conservative Member or Countryside Alliance steward prevented the attendance of the British National party at the so-called march for the countryside.

David Burnside: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salter: I will not give way. I have only three or four minutes to speak.

Most objectionable of all is the entirely false premise that we have some kind of apartheid Britain: one country that is urban, another that is rural. MORI recently polled a substantial sample of people, both from urban and rural environments. What were the top six issues in rural Britain? No. 1 was transport—well, are we surprised at that? No. 2 was protection of the environment. No. 3 was conservation of wildlife. No. 4 was the need to improve our infrastructure and our road system. No. 5 was crime. No. 6 was unemployment. The fact remains that the issues that affect rural Britain affect this country as a whole, and the spurious divide between town and country has to be challenged.

A tremendous contribution has been made by shooting not only to the rural economy but to the country as a whole. I would like to pay tribute to the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, which has certainly helped me and was kind enough to invite my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs and me to address a fringe meeting at the Labour party conference in Blackpool. Incidentally, that conference was not disrupted by the provisional wing of the Countryside Alliance, due to the arrest of Janet George and other prominent Countryside Alliance activists by the Lancashire constabulary, to whom we should pay tribute for upholding law and order in Blackpool and elsewhere. Sadly, I believe that those people have now been released.

In the United Kingdom, 26,300 full-time jobs are directly dependent on shooting. Another 13,450 are indirectly dependent on it. That is many more than the 700 jobs that relate directly to hunting, as identified in the Burns report, and very different from the 60,000 jobs that were supposed to be under threat if hunting were banned. Those were more lies and smears put about by the Countryside Alliance.

David Taylor: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Salter: No, I will not.

I also want to pay tribute to the shooters' acknowledgment of the contribution that the Labour party has already made to enhancing and developing their sport. I quote from the British Association for Shooting and Conservation's document:

"BASC warmly welcomes the ... commitment made by the Labour party in its General Election Manifesto 2001, which states an unequivocal support for the sport of shooting".

I thank the association for that truthful acknowledgement of my party's true intentions when it comes to shooting.

On angling, nothing gave me greater pleasure than to read last week in the angling press the whines and whinges of the foxhunters saying that there were not enough anglers on the Countryside Alliance march. Too right, there were not enough anglers! If every angler I know, having caught a prize specimen fish, had to throw it to a pack of hounds to have it ripped to pieces, and smear its blood on their forehead in the barbaric way in which foxhunters used to do, there is no way that they would ever fish again. Three million anglers in this country will not be conned, either by the Tory party or by the Countryside Alliance.

In conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "More! More!"] You can have 20 more minutes of this! In conclusion, we are facing the threat of global terrorism. We live in a world that is interdependent. We are one people, one nation, one world. The idea that the pathetic divisions that the Conservative party and their allies in the Countryside Alliance—let us never forget that 82 per cent. of those on the march were going to vote Conservative—are trying to portray are entirely false. Never mind town and country—whatever happened to one-nation Conservatism?

9.43 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I certainly give the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) full marks for volume, although he perhaps ought to be reminded that the president of the Countryside Alliance is a Labour peer and its chief executive is a member of the Labour party. I therefore regard his attacks on that organisation as, at best, intemperate.

The countryside is in crisis. The desperate plight of the countryside is both tangible and deeply felt. On 22 September, people from every part of the country descended on the streets of London. The crowd was good-natured, but as their numbers multiplied it became apparent that something extraordinary was taking place: the biggest demonstration in Britain's post-war history. Perhaps more extraordinary still was the reason for this gathering of 400,000 people. It was not for some fashionable, liberal cause, but rather a cry from the heart for this nation's greatest treasure: the countryside.

Some people have tried to dismiss that event as an aberration. I know that the Minister for Rural Affairs is an honourable and generous man. I had hoped that he would come to the House today and refute his remark that the march was an incoherent muddle, but he did not do so. I am disappointed, because I thought better of him. However, perhaps he will dissociate himself from the following statement:

"In broad terms the countryside is prosperous, contented and reasonably well-served."

That was the Prime Minister's analysis in 2000. If he said that today he surely would be ashamed of himself. If he went to the countryside and said it, he would not receive a happy reception.

The countryside is in crisis at every level: economic, environmental and social. I make no apologies for saying that agriculture is at the centre of that crisis. Farm incomes have plummeted. Incomes are at their lowest level since the 1930s. To put it another way, incomes are just 61 per cent. of their 1995 levels. How does that compare with the other countries of Europe? In the Netherlands the figure is 84 per cent., and it is more than 100 per cent. in 10 EU countries.

The crisis in Britain's countryside cannot be excused as part of some global phenomenon. Farm gate prices prove the point. We have the lowest prices for eggs in the EU bar Belgium, and the lowest prices for milk, butter and pig meat bar none. At the same time, input costs are rising. Figures from the House of Commons Library suggest that in the United Kingdom they are rising by about 0.6 per cent. a year, whereas in the rest of Europe they are falling by about 1.2 per cent.

That is a disaster for the rural economy, and it affects not just farmers. The point that many Labour Members do not seem to grasp and are not prepared to accept, although many of them take these issues seriously and have genuine concerns about the countryside, is that when farming suffers, the whole rural economy suffers. There is a knock-on effect on rural businesses—rural suppliers and retail businesses. Recently, I was in the small town of Holbeach in my constituency where a clothes retailer told me that his business had plummeted since the agricultural recession. That is true of many retail businesses throughout the countryside.

The countryside is also under threat from over-development. Bulldozers have been used to destroy thousands of acres of rural Britain, with the promise of much more destruction to come. Once that has gone it will never be replaced. Unlike cities, the countryside cannot be rebuilt. If farmers are driven off the land, there will be no one to look after it.

Jim Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: I cannot give way, because time is short, and the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) cut into the Minister's time. If the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) writes to me, I will be more than happy to give him an appropriate reply or a short lecture.

The point about the countryside that we enjoy is that it is an environment manufactured by farmers over centuries and maintained by farmers. Just as the landscape has suffered, so have its people. Public services in rural areas have declined. I ask the Minister whether there are more post offices in rural areas now than there were in 1997, or fewer. Are there more local village shops, or fewer? Are there fewer pubs or more pubs? Are there fewer resources and services in rural communities than there were in 1997? The answer is unequivocal. All those trades and services are in decline, and that is contributing to low morale, to the feelings of despondency and neglect and to the belief among people in the countryside that the Government do not care for them.

The local government settlement that we discussed yesterday has exacerbated that problem. Time and again we have said that, when the Government deal with public services, they should take account of the particular problems of sparsity, rurality and remoteness, but they have refused to listen. I do not take anything away from the concerns of people in inner cities and the declining suburbs, but only rural Britain perceives a threat to its very existence.

At the heart of the problem is agriculture. While it is important to emphasise the need for diversification and the stimulation of other employment in rural areas, agriculture is at the core of the economic, environmental and social character of the countryside.

There are no simple solutions to these problems, but I believe that there are two competing visions for our countryside.

There are those who place undue emphasis on the interdependence of town and country, and to some extent they are of course interdependent, but that must not be used to disguise the particular needs—the particular and proper demands—of rural areas.

There are those who emphasise the use of the countryside as a resource for the population as a whole, but the countryside is not an abstraction; it is composed of real communities. No one would suggest that a policy for any large urban community should be primarily in the interests of the people who reside elsewhere.

There are those who play down the importance of agriculture to the countryside, while simultaneously telling us to reduce our dependence on agriculture. Conservatives believe that farming is the foundation of a sustainable rural economy, and there can be no sustainable countryside without viable agriculture.

There are those who misrepresent the problems of social exclusion in the countryside as problems caused by the countryside. Conservatives believe that the hidden poverty in the countryside must be addressed, and that rural deprivation is in part the result of unfair funding arrangements.

Finally, there are those who stifle the debate on rural policy by accusing dissenters of setting town against country. We heard that tonight from the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter). Conservatives recognise that in some respects town and country have different needs, which should not be swept under the carpet; but above all we believe that town and country are united in wanting the countryside to be delivered from those who seek to ruin it.

Perhaps the Minister will answer some specific questions. We have heard this evening about the need for broadband to be made more widely available, to allow economic diversity. We have heard about the inflexibility of the 20-day rule, and about its more flexible application in Scotland. That was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon

[Mr. Hayes]

(Mr. Curry). We have heard about the need to support diversification within agriculture, allowing the dairy industry, for example, to become involved in processing by giving it tax breaks and other advantages.

Let me finally say this:

"the Countryside Alliance did what the Chartists, the Hunger Marchers and CND had all failed to do. The turnout"—

for the countryside march, that is—

"was . . . exceptional . . . their peaceful presence in such numbers on the streets entitles the protesters to respect, both for their cause and for their engagement."

Those are not my words, but those of a *The Guardian* editorial.

It was G.K. Chesterton who wrote

"we are the people of England; and we have not spoken yet."

He wrote

"Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget."

In 1998, a quarter of a million people marched for the countryside and said "Listen to us", but this Government were unmoved. Last month they returned in greater numbers. The people have spoken loudly and clearly; this time, surely, the Government must listen and not forget.

9.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I welcome the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) to the Dispatch Box, where he is appearing for the first time with his new Front-Bench team. I am not sure that his grasp of the range of countryside issues has developed yet, but no doubt it will do so in due course.

I think it only courteous to respond to some of what has been said in the time remaining to me. The hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) made some very fair points about regulations on beef exports. We are trying to deal with that. The regulations are changing, which we believe will encourage more people to come into the market.

The Government have committed £30 million to broadband roll-out. We have also supported local initiatives such as "Act Now" in Cornwall, which is providing broadband access in rural areas. We currently have 67 per cent. access, which is one of the highest rates in the G7 countries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) was right to point out that unemployment has fallen dramatically in rural areas. I would have thought that Opposition Front Benchers would congratulate the Government on the huge falls in unemployment in their constituencies under our policies, but surprisingly we heard not a word about that from them.

I strongly disagree with what the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said about the Secretary of State. This country now has a great deal of support in Europe—which, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, contrasts with the situation under the last Government, when we were completely isolated, our opinions counted for nothing, and we had no influence over anything. Now, we have support from member states who back the kind of proposals that are in the mid-term review. The Commission's proposals have been very much influenced by the arguments from this country. We are very much at the heart of the European Union, and are driving forward the changes. There has been no agreement on the mid-term review as yet, so I am not sure to what the hon. Gentleman's comments on the Meat and Livestock Commission relate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) made an excellent point about those who wish to exploit a mythical divide between urban and rural areas. Most people in urban or rural areas have the same concerns and worries. We recognise those concerns and we do not seek to make false distinctions. My hon. Friend was right also to mention the importance of shooting and fishing and the fact that they are separate issues. He was right also that many who support shooting and angling do not support foxhunting. The distinctions ought to be made.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings said that there were serious problems in agriculture, and no one would dispute that. The hon. Member for Gordon was fair to point out that those problems did not begin with the election of this Government. The problems are deep-seated, which is precisely why the Government set up the Food and Farming Commission to address them. The commission has received £500 million and the Government have provided £1.6 billion through the England rural development programme. The money has led to the reinstatement of the sort of schemes that every Member has been talking about today, including the need to reconnect farmers with the marketplace and the need to support marketing and integration. The previous Government axed marketing and processing grants; so much for their concern about agriculture and about meeting those needs. We have reinstated those grants in relation to the rural development fund. One of the problems that we face is that our share of the European rural development fund is a pathetic 3.5 per cent. [HON. MEMBERS: "Whose fault is that?"] I will tell hon. Members; the amount is based on the historical record over the last 18 years of what was spent in rural areas. I thank hon. Members for the invitation to make that point. That was useful.

For all the rhetoric that we have heard tonight, the Conservatives, when they were in power, could have spent more in rural areas and on a rural strategy but nothing was done. We have been paying the price since. There has been selective quoting from rural advocates, as rural agencies have highlighted important successes with rural proofing, which was introduced by the Government.

Conservative policies for the countryside were summed up in the 25 new policies and initiatives about which we heard at Bournemouth. It is a pity that we did not play "Name that Policy" to see who could recite them all. In a desperate bid to find new policies, someone was sent into the depths of Central Office to a filing cabinet with a skull and cross bones and a sign saying "Danger: do not open". He pulled out a drawer and, after removing Edwina's diaries, found a file marked "Rejected mad policies". The policies date back to the 1980s, and include the selling of housing association houses in rural areas. How will that help

rural housing need and rural communities? How will charities, many of which finance rural housing associations, feel about the fact that the Conservatives are pledged to sell off those homes, many of which were built with donations from local landowners who donated land and money and put the houses into trust for the local communities to benefit? They will be sold off at a discount—

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 192, Noes 283.

Division No. 322] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton – Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell – Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M – Worcs)*
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M – Kent)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M – Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Widdecombe, rh Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger – Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and Angela Watkinson

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Claphām, Michael
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*

Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis – Thomas, Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca – Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall – Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe Lunesdale)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stewart, David *(Inverness E Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 279, Noes 185.

Division No. 323] **[10:12 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*

Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis – Thomas, Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca – Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall – Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe Lunesdale)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stewart, David *(Inverness E Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy

Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton – Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell – Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M – Worcs)*
MacKay, rh Andrew
Malins, Humfrey
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M – Kent)*
Robinson, Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M – Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Widdecombe, rh Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger – Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and Angela Watkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House acknowledges the millions of British people dependent on the rural economy; welcomes the Government's support for the farming and food industry in meeting the enormous challenges of change; endorses the Government's commitment to rural communities as set out in the Rural White Paper; applauds the Government's wider record on public service delivery in rural areas; welcomes the £239 million allocated over three years to 2003–04 for new and improved rural transport services; further welcomes schemes in place to provide affordable housing in rural areas, including the Rural Exception and the doubling of the Housing Corporation's Rural Target; commends the efforts to retain the rural post office network and expand services; further applauds the Government's commitment to invest more than £500 million extra over three years in sustainable food and farming, including £200 million in 2005–06 to implement the core recommendations of the Curry Commission; acknowledges the establishment for the first time of a rural PSA target for increased productivity and improved access to vital public services for all rural people; and calls upon the Government to continue pursuing a strategy based on long term policies to regenerate British agriculture, improve rural services and revitalise the rural economy as a whole.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. Barry Gardiner be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Angela Eagle be added.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Ordered,

That Mr Anthony D. Wright be discharged from the Select Committee on Public Administration and Mr Kelvin Hopkins be added.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

PETITIONS

Air Ambulance Services

10.24 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): This petition from the residents of the Boston and Skegness constituency declares that the

Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire Air Ambulance provides a vital community service; and that an annual budget of £1 million is needed to keep its helicopters flying.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Health to express his support for the work of the Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire Air Ambulance and to take the appropriate action to ensure the continued operation of this vital service.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Cliffe Airport

10.25 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The Government's airport review sets out one option for a new hub airport at Cliffe, just 2,000 yards from my constituency boundary. It would cause unspeakable environmental damage and noise, air and light pollution. Therefore, Councillor Mark Howard of Canvey Island, Mr. Tony Thomas of Hadleigh and Mr. Adrian Roper of Benfleet, all of whose communities would be damaged by the proposal, have helped to compile a petition of about 10,000 signatures in the following terms:

To the honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of concerned residents of South East Essex and surrounding areas sheweth that the Government's proposed Cliffe Airport option appears from the very scant details so far revealed by the Government to offer far more disadvantages than advantages to South East Essex and the Government has totally failed to consult the people of S. E. Essex on the question.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Government to rescind its Cliffe airport option and undertake substantial, informed and open consultation in S. E. Essex.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Podiatry Services

10.27 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): This petitition relates to podiatry services in the Gosport and Portsmouth area. Its origin is a circular from the national health service of October 2001 entitled "Improving podiatry services for local people". One might therefore reasonably expect services to improve. The truth is that, of the 900 people referred monthly for podiatry care, most will not receive it and existing patients will be denied it. As the circular says:

"Many people with relatively low needs who have become accustomed to receiving foot care will no longer be able to do so ... The podiatry service will provide shorter packages of treatment for conditions that can be improved. Ongoing care will only take place where the health of limbs is vulnerable."

My constituents are baffled and angered by that and more than 200 signatures have been put to a petition that states that the residents of the area are

distressed and alarmed by the reduction in podiatry services which will end the provision of foot care to the wide range of local residents, many of whom are elderly and infirm, and notes that many will have great difficulty or expense in making alternative arrangements for foot care.

The petitioners therefore plead that the Secretary of State should

restore services in Gosport and the other areas in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to their former level.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Pension Funds

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10.28 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I am most grateful that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have given me this opportunity to discuss pensions and, in particular, the plight of workers at ASW Sheerness and ASW Cardiff. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) also hopes to catch your eye.

This has been our second day of lobbying Parliament. Fifty-two Members have already signed our early-day motion and, late last night, I handed in the ASW Sheerness petition to the House. I am most grateful to see so many Welsh Labour colleagues here to support me.

Yesterday, the ASW pension action group from both Sheerness and Cardiff saw my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury as well as Des Hamilton from the Office of the Pensions Advisory Service and Mr. Geoffrey Norris at No. 10 Downing street. I know that from our debrief later on yesterday evening that the group found the meetings helpful, stimulating and thought provoking. Even at this early stage of our negotiations for a just settlement to the pension fund, I want to place on record my thanks to Ministers for their willingness to engage in this process.

Three months ago, I was looking forward to a quiet weekend and was independently minding my business on the train home to Sittingbourne when I was called on my mobile just after 7.15 pm on Thursday 4 July 2002 by Graham Mackenzie, the then chief executive officer of the ASW Group. He told me that the company was likely to go into receivership.

It took me some time to find all our Ministers and some of their Welsh equivalents. It was well past midnight before I reached the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who was still up preparing her speech in a hotel in Cambridge.

I should like to add a note of thanks and gratitude to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions, who is responsible for manufacturing, and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), as well as the First Minister for Wales and, again, Mr. Geoffrey Norris at No. 10, for trying to find a way of preventing the company from going into receivership. The blame can be squarely laid at the door of the dithering bankers representing a once-famous bank, NatWest.

Unless we are in our 50s and beginning to think about retirement—that fantasy house we have dreamt about or that cruise we have always wanted to take—we rarely think about our pension and what it is worth. We pay into a scheme and expect it to bring if not rich dividends, at least a comfortable existence. I am beginning to think that a large majority of working people in this country are in for a nasty shock.

[Mr. Derek Wyatt]

About 8.5 million people in the UK have a final pension scheme. They are also known as defined benefits schemes. In practice, they are a way that our people save for a second pension, knowing that the state pension will not always cater for all their needs. All Governments have encouraged employees to take out such pensions. I am also beginning to suspect that final pension schemes will become better known over the next few years as the pension virus that slipped under our doors at work and disappeared through the cracks in the window. I suspect that many final pension schemes are in deficit. Over the past few months, I have read that BT and Trinity Mirror's pension schemes are billions of pounds in debt. I wonder how many other FTSE 100 companies' schemes are in the same boat.

The analysis by the TUC of the Government Actuary's figures suggests that 1.8 million fewer employees are in final salary schemes than a decade ago. Its figures show that there were 5.6 million employees in such schemes in 1991 compared to 3.8 million in 2001. Of those, only 200,000 have transferred to money-only schemes, some of which are inferior, leaving a net loss of 1.6 million fewer people with any form of occupational pension. So pensioner poverty—something that the Government are proud to be helping to solve—will be a growing problem unless we do something about it now.

I am of course aware that the Government are preparing a Green Paper on pensions which is being drawn up by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Treasury. Green Papers are the slow burn of Governments. They take between three and five years to be enacted. FTSE 100 companies would never sanction Green Papers because none of the blue-sky thinking is ever costed. That is indicative of Whitehall culture, which finds doing basic sums difficult. How can politicians, stakeholders and our citizens and would-be voters ever understand what choices they have unless they know what the costs will be to both the Exchequer and, frankly, their back pocket? It is naïve of civil servants to maintain that absurd situation. I hope to persuade my right hon. Friend to ensure that the Green Paper, which I hope will be published before Christmas, comes with fully costed models so that we can better understand the alternative packages that are before us. Not to do so would be a great mistake. I want to see an end for ever to pensioner poverty. At the same time, we all need to know the likely cost implications.

Let me return to the grave issue of the ASW Sheerness pension problem. I have been made redundant twice in my life. The first time was a shock; the second time was shocking. The experience burns a hole in one's being. It burns doubly when a person has a young family and a hefty mortgage to pay. It hurts our closest relationships. Imagine then that at the same time as being made redundant, someone is told that their final salary scheme has been placed into administration and that, because of the arcane system, it may be three, four or five years before it is possible to know what it is worth and whether what that person has been saving for is worth anything at all. It is the worst kind of double whammy. That has happened to more than 1,000 workers at both ASW Sheerness and ASW Cardiff. They are powerless. They have been mugged by the pension virus.

It is not just ASW workers who have experienced that appalling problem. Nearly 300 final pension schemes have been wound up this year, affecting 40,000 people. Consider the case of Lister's in Haywood, Lancashire. Its workers were originally told that they would get around 75 to 80 per cent. of their expected pension, but ended up with nothing. The hard-cash figures were stunning. The fund value was £6 million. The independent trustee charged £400,000. The legal fees were £80,000. KPMG receivers charged £49,000. For setting up the pensioners' annuities, Abbey National charged £130,000. There were other miscellaneous costs of £140,000. That gave a total of £800,000 of costs to administer a failed pension scheme, which is nearly 14 per cent. of the fund value.

United Engineering Forgings in Ayr, Scotland, went into insolvency and it was revealed that the employees' pension fund, run by Prudential, was underfunded to the tune of £12 million. Let us consider the case of Albert Fisher Group, which acquired Saphir Produce, whose pension fund was transferred to Albert Fisher. When Albert Fisher went broke, pensions from the original company, Saphir, were worth nothing.

In our meetings yesterday with the Minister for Pensions, the ASW pension group left nine questions for him to answer. I shall spare his blushes by not reading them into the record because I know that he has promised to respond to them over the next few weeks. However, I want to tell him about three cases to show him the brutality of the system. At ASW Sheerness a man with 31 years' service was due to retire on 31 July 2002. He had a written statement of pension benefits for that date which he naturally assumed to be legally enforceable. He has lost £3,600 per annum through the pension fund being put into administration. Ironically the date of his retirement was originally agreed to suit the company's requirements, and had he insisted on taking his pension sooner he would have lost nothing.

The second case concerns another man with 31 years' service who was due to retire on 31 August. He too had a written statement of benefits. After wind-up, the 30 per cent. reduction knocked more than £3,200 per annum off his pension. In this case it did not leave him enough to survive on and he has had to carry on working beyond his planned retirement date. The third case is that of a man who will retire at the end of November after 26 years in the pension fund. He has not even been advised yet of his reduced figures. He faces the prospect of retiring on an unknown but certainly heavily reduced retirement income without even the opportunity of continued working to offset the loss. Some of these people have worked 20, 25 or 30 years and paid £100 a month into a pension fund, and they have no rights over it. There are many more details of cases on a clever website, www.pensionstheft.org, which I urge Members to read.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wyatt: I will not.

I suggest to the Minister that there is a solution, which I hope will be included in the Green Paper. We need to take a lead from the USA and introduce a pension benefit guarantee. In the USA, when Polaroid and LTV,

ironically a steel company, filed for bankruptcy earlier in the year with serious shortfalls in their pensions, the guarantee came into play and the deficit was made good. Will the Minister consider introducing that scheme? However, instead of asking the financial markets to take the risk, could we consider funding it through the national insurance scheme that we all pay into? Will the Minister cost that option and show the figures in the Green Paper? That is the quickest and cleanest way to stop future workers being mugged.

In ASW's case, however, my workers may have to wait between three and five years before they find out whether they have a pension because the independent trustee can more or less take as long as he likes. It is, after all, in his interest to do so because he takes his fees from the pension fund. There is a case to be made for an independent trustee organisation, akin to the current Pensions Advisory Service, to be paid for by the Government.

While those workers are waiting, we would welcome the Government's commitment to right that wrong by making an ex gratia payment into the ASW pension funds at Sheerness and Cardiff. That would correct the appalling injustice and show our people, as we have done with the miners compensation fund and the Chatham dockyard workers, that this Government have proudly honoured their responsibilities, in sharp contrast to the Conservative party, which, on those two issues, sat on its collective hands for 18 years, refusing to budge. I implore the Minister to help us to secure that one-off payment to the ASW pension funds.

10.39 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) on securing this debate. I apologise for my voice, which was over-exerted in cheering Wales in its victory tonight over Italy.

This is a very serious issue, and I rise to speak as a Cardiff Member. The ASW plant in Cardiff is not in my constituency but in that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael), whose ministerial office precludes him from participating in this debate. I should also like to mention the interest of my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) and for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), who are present.

Yesterday, I went with representatives of the work force of ASW in Cardiff, my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and representatives of the ASW work force in Sheerness to meet the Minister for Pensions, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and other Ministers and advisors to discuss the plight of the ASW workers. It is fair to say that many of us did not realise the jaw-dropping injustice—that is the only way that one can describe it—of current occupational pensions law.

I spoke yesterday to someone called Brian from ASW in Cardiff. He is one of many who have worked for the same company, man and boy. He paid 5 per cent. of his salary into the pension scheme for 24 years on the promise that he would receive as a final pension an accrual rate of one 60th of his salary for each year's service. He might have expected, at current values, to retire on a pension of about £12,000. He did not choose to join the pension scheme; it was a condition of employment when he was a young man that he joined it. He did so in the expectation and on the promise that at the end of the day he would receive a pension. He never realised that if the company went into receivership he could lose everything—that he could end up with nothing.

In fairness, as I am sure my hon. Friend would agree, the situation in Cardiff might be even more critical than in Sheerness because the workers in Cardiff have no idea whether they will receive any pension at all once the benefits of the pension scheme have been distributed to current pensioners and the independent trustee has taken his cut. That is another issue, because the independent trustee is allowed to set his own fees, write his own cheques and take whatever proportion of the pension fund that he wishes in winding it up. There is no incentive whatever to do the job quickly, efficiently or effectively.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that the members of the ASW work force in Cardiff whom we met in Blackpool felt deeply aggrieved at the fact that every phone call that they made to the independent trustee cost an enormous amount of money—more than £300 per hour, I think. That emphasises my hon. Friend's point about the independent trustee being able to charge what he likes and take it out of the pension fund. Every phone call that the work force make reduces the amount of money that they are likely to receive.

Kevin Brennan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point because she is absolutely right: the workers are frightened to phone or write to the independent trustee because they know that every time they do so they are robbing themselves. Every time that he is asked a query about their pensions he will charge it to the fund. They face that uncertainty for three to five years.

The principles are all wrong. Pensions should be about security in retirement. It is completely wrong that the workers bear the risk when a company goes into receivership. I thought that shareholders were supposed to bear the risk of an investment, yet when a company goes under, their debts—those of the banks, anyway—are secured. The workers bear the risk not only of losing their jobs, as, sadly, many in Cardiff already have—some of them hope that they might get them back eventually, but many of them are out of work—but of losing their pensions. That cannot be right. It cannot be right that workers' pensions are put at risk when a company goes into receivership.

Wherever there is a risk, there must be a system to spread it across the entire pensions industry in the form of some discontinuance fund—or whatever one wants to call it—to protect workers. I urge the Minister to consider that in the Green Paper and to consider legislation in that regard. In the meantime, I urge the Government to consider very carefully the possibility of assisting the workers in their current plight.

Adam Price: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kevin Brennan: I will not be giving way. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman studies the courtesies normally observed during Adjournment debates. I will not give way for that reason.

I plead with the Minister to consider what legal means are available to help the workers in their current plight, and to consider the future when the Government next legislate on these matters.

10.44 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): On behalf of the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, who is present tonight, and myself, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) on securing the debate, although I offer no congratulations in respect of its subject matter. He has demonstrated a model of best practice in how Members of Parliament should act to protect the interests of their constituents. I know that in the past 24 hours alone he has lobbied the Prime Minister's office, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and myself; tabled an early-day motion with more than 50 signatures; and organised a petition, which was handed in to No. 10 yesterday. That has generated a huge amount of media interest, which I imagine will continue for some time.

I was not only sorry to hear about the case in yesterday's meeting, but I became more frustrated, agitated and, not least, angered as the full details of the case were unravelled in front of me. It must be causing those affected considerable distress and concern, and I am concerned that many individuals feel isolated and are receiving insufficient information about their future financial arrangements. I am therefore grateful to my hon. Friend for highlighting the problems facing members of the Allied Steel and Wire pension scheme.

The meeting that I attended with my hon. Friends the Members for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) and representatives of the ASW pensions action group was constructive. We identified several practical ways forward. I undertook to address a number of technical pensions issues in a detailed note to the action group and my hon. Friends, and to discuss the issues raised and the Government's approach to them with colleagues throughout Government. I shall also write to the independent trustee and OPAS about the range of concerns listed yesterday by the representatives of the steelworkers. I shall also write to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the pensions ombudsman specifically about the circumstances surrounding the early retirement packages of the two former ASW directors. Furthermore, I will reflect on how we might be able to help, by, for example, providing support from our officials and working with my hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey has called for the Green Paper to include costed models. I assure him that when we publish the Green Paper later in the year, it will include a financial assessment of the implications of our proposals—indeed, alongside the Green Paper we will publish a technical document that will set out that sort of detail and other material supporting our proposals.

The case raises two important issues. One concerns the fairness, or otherwise, of the current statutory priority order. The Pensions Act 1995 introduced a statutory priority order for occupational pension schemes that are subject to the minimum funding requirement and start to wind up from 6 April 1997. It sets out how the assets of the scheme are to be applied towards meeting the scheme's liabilities for pensions and other benefits.

The rationale behind the statutory priority order was to produce an equitable distribution of assets when a scheme winds up. That does not mean that the current priority order is ideal or, indeed, immutable. In fact, Alan Pickering's recent report has proposed a change in the order that might go some way to helping deferred as well as existing pensioners. I am sympathetic to what was said to me yesterday and to what Alan Pickering had to say in his report. We will examine that extremely carefully when preparing the Green Paper on pensions.

The second issue concerns the position of any debts due to the pension scheme in the overall priority list of creditors. Certain unpaid pension contributions may be pursued as a preferential debt in the event of insolvency of the employer. It seems to me that the issue is whether the contribution that employees have made—often over many years—to the success of their company and to the running of their pension fund, should enjoy a preferential status. I believe that the answer to that is self-evident, and I assure my hon. Friends that I will raise the matter with ministerial colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry.

In the meantime, my hon. Friend will be well aware that the Enterprise Bill will abolish the Crown's preferential right to recover unpaid taxes, and those changes will mean that the position of the remaining preferential creditors will be improved in cases where there is insufficient money to pay them in full.

It may also be possible under the provisions contained in the Pensions Act 1995 for members of the ASW pension schemes to have their state scheme rights restored, thus ensuring that they receive an additional pension under the state scheme in addition to their basic state pension. I will be writing to my hon. Friends and the group about this later.

Some of the concern in this case has centred on the activities of the independent trustee. I received a number of complaints about the trustees yesterday. I asked for those to be made to me in writing, not because I do not believe them but because I want them to be set out accurately. As soon as I have received these complaints, I have given an undertaking to raise them directly with both the independent trustee and with the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority.

When a scheme like ASW is winding up, it is understandable that members have genuine concerns about the cost of trustees' fees. The law requires the independent trustee to disclose the scale of the fees that have been charged to scheme members.

Independent trustees should also be able to demonstrate to OPRA that they are acting professionally and in the best interests of the members. If that is not the case, OPRA can replace trustees where it has evidence that those appointed by the insolvency practitioner are failing to carry out their duties in a responsible manner. As soon as I receive information and have confirmed what was said yesterday, I shall take steps to address the issues directly with the independent trustee and OPRA.

My hon. Friend has been in correspondence with me on issues involving additional voluntary contributions; he raised the issues with me again at yesterday's meeting. I have agreed to respond to specific cases that were taken up before yesterday. When I am sent further information, I undertake to write to my hon. Friend on the general issues of AVCs and how they relate to the various schemes in this context.

Under Inland Revenue rules, people can now take AVC benefits at any time between 50 and 75, whether or not they have left employment and whether or not they have started to draw their main scheme pension. However, scheme rules must have been amended to allow this. Therefore, before I can give a detailed answer to my hon. Friend, I shall await the details of the schemes as AVCs relate to them.

Having said that, I do not, unfortunately, know all the details of ASW's organisation of AVC arrangements. If there are additional problems in these areas, perhaps the best thing would be for my hon. Friend and his group to come back to me with fuller information. At each stage, we will see what we can do to assist the process of securing information and ensuring that the arrangements that are sought are available within the rules of the scheme.

My hon. Friend has called for an ex gratia payment to be paid into the pension scheme. I would not like to give him false hope. Indeed, I cannot give him any hope. The Government are not able to assist schemes in wind-up that are underfunded. I am unaware of any legal basis on which Ministers can make such payments. However, my hon. Friend mentioned payments to the miners compensation fund and the Chatham dockyard workers. I shall certainly look into those instances to ascertain whether they offer any way forward, while acknowledging that there may be significant differences between them and the current situation. I do not draw any parallels but I shall ensure that no stone is left unturned to try to resolve the questions that my hon. Friend raises. I will look into these matters and respond to him directly.

My hon. Friend called for the introduction of a form of pension benefit guarantee. The Government have previously considered putting in place measures to assist occupational pension schemes when the sponsoring employer becomes insolvent. Both issues of a central discontinuance fund and compulsory insurance were consulted on as part of the consultation process for the replacement of the minimum funding requirement. Both options received little support. That is mainly due to two factors. First, the majority of schemes are well run in this country. Those who are members of schemes and the trustees who represent them were not supportive of the idea that they should top-slice their well run schemes to assist the underfunding of poorly run schemes. Nor was there any great support for the idea of a fund linked to an insurance-based system. An insurance system would have to be created to re-invest in the risk associated with it. There was little support when we consulted on that.

A central discontinuance fund raises issues of affordability and sustainability, as well funded schemes would have to subsidise schemes that were less well funded or less well looked after. This option would also require, as I think my hon. Friend was hinting, an ultimate guarantor—that is, the state. The Government would be unable to take on this responsibility and the cost would ultimately fall on the taxpayers, including taxpayers paying into a well funded scheme and paying national insurance contributions, and taxpayers who have no other scheme at all and rely on the basic state pension scheme. There is therefore no possibility at this stage of the Government acceding to such a request.

Further, the issue of compulsory insurance arrangements raises the potential for abuse and a moral hazard. Some schemes may neglect their responsibilities and obligations to their members, in the knowledge that their liabilities will still be met in the event of insolvency.

I am aware that a number of concerns have been raised about the length of time that it can take to finalise arrangements when a scheme winds up. With this in mind, the Government introduced a package of measures in April this year designed to speed up the winding-up process. That legislation is part of the Government's continued commitment to enhancing the protection for pension scheme members. The legislation places greater visible accountability on those involved in winding up a pension scheme. The new rules mean that OPRA will have a more proactive role in facilitating the winding up of schemes and supporting the trustees.

In the light of the concerns raised, perhaps my hon. Friends would like me to arrange a meeting with OPRA on that specific point. If they want that to happen, I will make the necessary arrangements.

Finally, occupational pensions are an important part of the overall benefits or remuneration package offered by many employers to prospective and current employees. The forthcoming Green Paper on pensions will allow us to consult widely on how both employers and employees can be encouraged to acknowledge the value of this part of the remuneration package.

I therefore look forward to continuing a constructive dialogue with my hon. Friend and will pursue the matter on behalf of his constituents. I will do so in an honest and fair way. Where I can help, I will say so and do so. Where I cannot, I will be strictly honest about that. If we can work on that basis, I hope that I can help my hon. Friend and other colleagues in the House in their efforts to resolve a complicated and difficult situation. I wish him well, and anything that we can do to assist will be done.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 17 October 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL

MILFORD HAVEN PORT AUTHORITY BILL *[Lords]*

Considered; to be read the Third time.

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [16 October],

That Mr. John Hayes be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Mr. Peter Luff be added to the Committee—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Monday next.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Flood Alleviation

1. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If she will make a statement on Government investment in flood alleviation measures. [72342]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Flood management is a devolved responsibility and my answer relates to England only, where total Government funding on flood defence has risen from £312 million in 1997–98 to a projected £564 million in 2005–06. That is a substantial increase and is proof of the Government's continuing commitment to maintenance and improvement of flood defences.

Mr. Edwards: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply and acknowledge the significant increase in investment that the Government are putting in. Although I accept that his answer relates to England, I can assure him that the Welsh Assembly has funded a feasibility study in Monmouth which will hopefully lead to flood alleviation measures and prevent further flooding such as that which occurred in the past two years.

I draw my hon. Friend's attention to two main points. Despite assurances from the Association of British Insurers, certain people find that they are insured with a company—with Lloyds as the underwriter—that has not necessarily followed the same agreement with the Government. A constituent of mine, Dr. Jana Horak, was insured by Britannia Building Society and has been refused insurance twice. Will my hon. Friend also consider whether the Environment Agency could have more powers in relation to the tributaries to main rivers, which are often the cause of flooding?

Mr. Morley: I am pleased to hear that flood defence schemes are going ahead in my hon. Friend's constituency; I am sure that that will be a great relief to his constituents. In that respect, I am somewhat surprised that there is a problem with insurance. The ABI announcement, which we thought helpful and constructive, said that insurance would continue to be provided by ABI's members in areas where flood defences may not exist at the moment but are planned within the next seven years. In fact, even in areas where there are no plans for flood defences, such issues will be looked at case by case. I suggest to my hon. Friend that his constituents should shop around the various companies. I know that a great many companies accept the commitments that the Government have given; they continue to provide that insurance, and we continue to work closely with the ABI. I should also point out that the chief executive of the ABI will speak to the associate parliamentary group on flooding at the Palace of Westminster at the end of this month. That will provide an opportunity for my hon. Friend and other hon. Members to put questions directly to the ABI.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): The Minister will recall his visit to Uckfield, in my constituency, two years ago this week, after the terrible flood that caused so much damage there. He will also recall the pledge that he made then, and which the Prime Minister repeated: that the Government would take action to prevent future floods. However, he will know that in spite of the extra money that he has mentioned, the Environment Agency is not proposing any significant plans to prevent future flooding in Uckfield, thereby making many homes and businesses uninsurable. Before we meet the agency next week, will he remind it of those pledges and say that doing nothing is not an option?

Mr. Morley: I am aware of those pledges. In fact, I visited Uckfield on a number of occasions, and I want progress to be made on reducing flood risk. The hon. Gentleman is doubtless aware that severe technical problems exist in Uckfield in terms of an appropriate flood defence. The narrowing of the river, and the role of the road bridge and of the mill, give rise to difficulties. It is difficult to overcome those technical problems, but despite that the agency is looking at immediate measures to try to improve the flow of water through Uckfield. Of course, it is also looking at a longer-term strategy through the catchment plan study. The hon. Gentleman

will also be aware that some of the new building that has taken place in Uckfield in recent years has not been carried out on a particularly appropriate site.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Will my hon. Friend convey my deep appreciation to the Environment Agency and the flood defence committee in my constituency, following the horrific floods more than two years ago in South Church and West Auckland? Some £4.5 million was spent, and the thoroughness of their planning and the way in which they consulted local people and local authorities was exemplary and much appreciated.

Mr. Morley: I am very pleased to hear that comment from my right hon. Friend. I received a very detailed representation from his constituents about the terrible impact of those floods at the time, which demonstrates the social and personal consequences of flooding. I am pleased that the schemes are going ahead, however, and I am particularly pleased about the way in which local communities are being involved in the consultation, planning and discussion of future flood defence schemes. I hope that that is effective and that it reduces the risk that his constituents have faced over recent years.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Minister accept that, of course, the increased contribution to flood defences is welcome in global terms, but the insurance industry is still concerned about the lack of specifics? Will he take note of the example of Scotland, where not only is proportional expenditure on flood defences growing at a faster rate than in England, but there is a statutory obligation to report flood defences? Insurance companies in England are complaining that they have insufficient information about flood defences, which they have to glean from local newspaper reports. As a result, premiums are higher and the threat to insurance cover is greater. Does he not recognise that statutory reporting would give the insurance companies the opportunities that they need to provide competitive premiums, rather than everybody paying higher premiums across the board while some people run the risk of not being covered at all?

Mr. Morley: I certainly accept that information is crucial in ascertaining risk, and that ascertaining risk determines insurance premiums and insurance availability. I do not close my mind to any of those approaches. The ABI has talked about such measures in discussions with us, and we are willing to consider them. I want to emphasise, however, that we have a good dialogue with the insurance companies and a major forward capital investment plan. We are making our information available, which is very much appreciated—as is the extra money—and we are very much on track to reduce substantially the risk of flooding in this country, although no one, in any circumstances, can guarantee that floods will not happen.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Can my hon. Friend enlighten me on the discussions that the Select Committee had more than a year ago on the idea of paying farmers to allow their land to flood naturally as an effective means of flood protection? In what way might he influence possible changes in the planning system to ensure the introduction of a genuine precautionary principle, so that we do not build on a flood plain and end up with many of the risks that, only too often, have come to fruition?

Mr. Morley: I was impressed by the quality of the Select Committee report, which considered flood defence strategy in depth. We accept that there is a case for looking at a range of sustainable measures in relation to flood defence. One of them could be reinstating flood meadows and flood plains. Recently, I opened the Washbanks scheme, which is one of the managed realignment schemes whereby landowners have either sold their land or entered into countryside stewardship agreements, as part of a sophisticated and sustainable approach to defending our coast, shores and rivers, which produces an environmental and, in some cases, an economic gain, too.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The Minister will know of grave concerns in many constituencies, including mine, which have, in effect, been designated as at risk from flooding, according to the Environment Agency flood plain maps. That is despite highly efficient internal drainage, good flood defences and no record of recent floods. Surely it is common sense that such assessments take proper heed of such factors, and not just of topography, to assuage the fears of householders, businesses, insurers and economic investors.

Mr. Morley: It is certainly the case that if people are in a flood risk area, it does not necessarily mean that the risks of flooding are very high. It is important, however, that people who are in a flood risk area are aware of what those risks are. That is part of the Environment Agency's flood awareness campaign. Interpreting that is part of our dialogue with insurance companies. We, with the Environment Agency, are investing in much more accurate digital mapping in relation to flood risk. Again, that helps people to understand the risk, which should mean that people do not face difficulties with insurance cover for the future.

Mr. Speaker: I call Dr. Pugh. Sorry, Mr. Hayes has a further question.

Mr. Hayes: I accept what the Minister says about discussions with insurance companies but, as he will have heard earlier from the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), that is by no means universally successful. I am surprised that the Minister did not mention obliging local authorities to carry out strategic flood risk assessments, which would have been a better answer, if I might say so. The problem with those assessments is that they are largely unfunded, they are not always done in areas where the local authority has the resources or the wherewithal to commit to carry them out quickly, and the maps are still in existence. Until those flood plain maps are withdrawn, economic investors, local people and, as we have heard, some insurers will continue to believe that areas with no risk, in real terms, of flooding—and no record of flooding—

are dangerous places to live in, to invest in and to insure. That needs to be dealt with urgently. The Minister has a responsibility to assuage those fears.

Mr. Morley: The insurance industry is a free-market industry, and people are free to shop around and to get the best quote and the most appropriate cover. It is interesting that the Conservatives feel that we should somehow interfere with that market mechanism.

Local authority assessments are not really suitable for insurance companies in relation to such issues, but digital mapping most certainly is. In my experience, the main insurance companies are well aware of how to interpret the risks shown in flood-risk mapping. I am a Lincolnshire Member of Parliament and I am not aware of widespread problems in obtaining insurance in Lincolnshire. The problem should be put into perspective. More information is certainly important and realistic interpretation is absolutely vital. We will continue our dialogue with the insurance companies and others to make sure that the risks are understood.

Mr. Speaker: I call Dr. Pugh again.

Recycling

2. **Dr. John Pugh** (Southport): If she will make a statement on the role of doorstep collection and taxation measures in increasing recycling rates. [72344]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The answer remains the same. The Prime Minister's strategy unit is currently completing a study on waste. As part of this, it is considering what mechanisms and instruments will best help to achieve our aim of increasing household waste recycling.

Dr. Pugh: Does the Minister recognise that many councils are currently stretched to find the resources to set up doorstep recycling schemes? Despite a very co-operative public in my constituency, the local council is forced to run plastic recycling schemes only in areas that can draw upon specific and additional grants, such as those for neighbourhood renewal. Such areas are not always the best ones for high-volume recycling. Will the Minister undertake to look into this specific problem?

Mr. Meacher: Of course, I am very concerned about levels of recycling, including kerbside collection. To reach the challenging targets for recycling that we have set, our view is that all authorities—or certainly most of them—will have to adopt kerbside collection.

I am surprised by what the hon. Gentleman said about funding. In the spending review 2000, we increased spending on the environmental protection and cultural services part of the revenue support grant by £1.1 billion in the third year over baseline. In the spending review 2002, we increased that provision by a further £670 million for the three years to 2005–06. Final decisions on additional funding will be made when the strategy unit's report is published.

In addition to that, we have just made allocations of £140 million under the local authority recycling waste minimisation fund. Of 196 bids, 112 were successful and £50 million has been distributed. The hon. Gentleman's local authority should have the resources necessary to meet the targets.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): One of the most interesting pieces of taxation designed to encourage recycling recently has been the decision in the Irish Republic to introduce a tax on plastic disposable shopping bags. I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of early-day motion 1730 in my name, which now receives the support from dozens of Members on both sides of the House, calling for such a tax in this country. Will he give us an idea of whether he is considering the introduction of such a measure in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Meacher: We have been watching closely what has happened in Ireland. I understand that there has been a 90 per cent. reduction in the use of plastic bags. In this country, the figures are quite daunting. Eight billion plastic bags are used every year, which, on average, is about 135 for each person. Therefore, reducing that figure would be very worthwhile. A plastic bag tax is not the only way of dealing with the problem, but I assure my hon. Friend that the strategy unit has been to Ireland, talked to those involved, and will certainly be considering this point in its report.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Although we all support the idea of increasing the collection of goods for recycling, the Minister will surely accept that that does not finish the process. Recycling is accomplished when one has an economic use for the product to be recycled. The Government have just signed up to new European regulations, which will come into force in a couple of years, on the disposal of electronic and electrical goods. However, we know that there are some products—the plastic casings from video and cassette recorders, for example—for which there is no available use at the moment. What does the Minister intend to do in the intervening few years to try to encourage the private sector to develop alternative uses for some of those materials, so that we can avoid what happened with fridges and ensure that the entire system is in place when the new regulations come into force?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman has just answered his own question. There are two or three years before 2005–06, when the directive on waste from electrical and electronic equipment comes into force, and one means of ensuring that the technology is put in place is the pressure exerted by the directive. It is right that electrical and electronic goods should not be landfilled. That is not an appropriate form of environmental disposal. It is clearly right that such goods should be recycled and reused.

The difference in the case of fridges is that the regulation became operative throughout the European Community on day one, which was 1 January 2002, whereas a directive that has to be transposed gives industry much more time properly to accommodate it. That is exactly what we intend. We have already had extensive discussions with industry, and I shall ensure that there are appropriate reprocessing uses for all those electrical products.

Organic Action Plan

3. **Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford): What progress she has made with the organic action plan; and if she will make a statement. [72345]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Work is continuing on the 21 points in the organic action plan. It is a plan for the whole food chain, and a number of stakeholders, including retailers, have work in hand to take forward the plan's objectives. In DEFRA we are focusing on amendments to the organic farming scheme, on organic standards for the UK and on setting up a new organic advisory committee.

Joan Ruddock: I thank my right hon. and hon. Friends for their commitment on this issue and their positive responses to the organic targets campaign. We now have in place a plan and a significant target but no time frame. Will my right hon. Friend therefore introduce measures to make it necessary to achieve by 2010 the target of 70 per cent. of organic produce to come from British producers?

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support for the organic action plan, which the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), launched on 29 July. It has been universally well received and we certainly intend now to put it into place. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) has rightly said, there is a commitment to increase to 70 per cent. the market share of UK-grown organic products, which is more than double the current level of 30 per cent.

It is reasonable, however, that there is a time scale within which it must be achieved. It is not for the Government unilaterally to pick that deadline; clearly we must consult the industry and the British Retail Consortium about what is practicable. I chair the organic action plan group and, at the next meeting, I shall be raising the deadline as a major item on the agenda because I entirely agree that, for the plan to be successful, there must be not only a target but a deadline by which it must be achieved.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I am sure that the Minister will join me in welcoming the National Assembly's decision this week to extend organic stewardship for farmers in Wales. It is a very welcome step. Is he aware of the threat that inadequate labelling of genetically modified food poses to the organic market, both for farmers and consumers? Will he take this opportunity to clarify at the European level the Government's position on what will happen with GM labelling and its relationship to an important and growing organic market in this country?

Mr. Meacher: Yes; it is an important issue. Let me make it clear that the Government strongly support a framework of labelling and traceability to the fullest extent that is practicable and workable. We support the proposal, which is probably being discussed at this very moment in Luxembourg, for a 1 per cent. threshold for the labelling of adventitious GM presence in non-GM products.

The issue to which the hon. Gentleman may be referring, which is much more difficult, is the labelling of GM-derived products. As I said, I am strongly sympathetic to the argument that we should have the fullest and most appropriate labelling for the consumer. The problem is that there is no distinguishability in DNA terms between GM derivatives and non-GM derivatives. For example, that is the case with highly refined maize oils. Apart from that logistical problem, if there is an insistence on labels, despite the issue of traceability and very long supply chains that often start outside the European Union, they could not be guaranteed and could be seriously misleading to the consumer. We must bear in mind that constraint.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Once again, news from a major retailer this week tells of another increase in sales of organic produce, the majority of which is provided by imports. Does my right hon. Friend, like me, see that farmers are holding back from converting to organic farming because they fear that by the time that they have converted, the price premium will be lost to them? Can his Department reassure farmers so as to persuade more of them to undertake the conversion?

Mr. Meacher: That is a very important issue. My hon. Friend is right that the major multiple retailers are being very helpful in trying to increase sales of organic products. Without seeking to make a commercial plug, I can say that Waitrose and Sainsbury's are seeking to increase import replacement in respect of organic products, which is very helpful.

On my hon. Friend's question about farmers converting, we have now extended the organic farming scheme to ensure that farmers who have converted can enter into five-year agreements to observe the environmental conditions of the scheme in return for payments. We have also very substantially increased conversion aid for top fruit production. For top fruit conversions, we are now proposing to pay £600 per hectare per year for the first three years and £30 for the next seven years. We are considering long-term payment commitments to encourage farmers to initiate conversion, with the assurance that they will continue long enough for conversion to be well worth while commercially.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Government constantly talk about their support for organic farming, but the reality is rather different. Some 70 per cent. of organic food is imported, only 4 per cent. of UK farmland is handed over to organic production and the funds available for conversion are wildly inadequate. The organic milk price is now below the non-organic price, so a number of milk producers are going the wrong way and switching back to non-organic production. As to GM, the truth is that this Government are going to allow the planting of GM maize crops within 200 m of organic ones, with the serious risk of cross-fertilisation. Does the Minister not understand that we do not need any more focus groups, initiatives, launches, leaflets or committees? He was on

about committees again a moment ago, but what the people of this country want is decent, British-produced organic produce at a decent price.

Mr. Meacher: It behoves me to welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Dispatch Box, as I believe that that was his first appearance there. If it is to be characteristic of all his appearances, I can see that we are going to have a lot of fun.

What the hon. Gentleman did not say is that while the total sums available for organic farming are still relatively small, they are hugely increasing on the level that we inherited. The amount provided this year is £20 million, but when his Government left office, it was half a million pounds, so it does not behove him to criticise us. That amount may not be enough, but I would have hoped that, as we have increased it 40 times in five years, we might get some congratulation from him. I am very keen to see an increase in UK-grown organic production. I repeat that the organic action plan, which the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), launched two or three months ago, has gone down extremely well in all sections of the organic industry. We are pressing the issue as fast as the industry believes seriously possible.

On GM, the separation distances to which the hon. Gentleman referred were those operated by the Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops, SCIMAC—the biotech industry—on the basis that they would be sufficient to prevent cross-contamination. In the event of three years of the farm scale evaluation trials, no organic crop has lost its certification as a result of the GM trials, but of course this is a serious issue, which we are further considering.

I repeat that £20 million is now going into organic—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) asked six or seven questions; I shall answer only three or four, but it he wants me to go on, I shall be glad to do so. We are putting £20 million into organic production this year. That figure will rise in the next two or three years to at least £23 million, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that that is a vast improvement on anything that his Government could do.

Sugar

4. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What recent assessment she has made of the impact of the sugar regime on (a) UK consumers and (b) developing country exporters. [72346]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The Government fully support the case for reform of the EU sugar regime, particularly in respect of price and market access.

Dr. Cable: Does the Minister agree that the present system is extremely attractive to large beet growers and to the company which has a virtual monopoly of processing, but is extremely damaging to consumers, taxpayers and, above all, large numbers of very poor people in low income countries, who are trying to sell into a world market where the price is a third of that in Europe? As the first step to the reform which he acknowledges is needed, will he join me in supporting Oxfam's demand for an immediate 25 per cent. cut in quota production?

Alun Michael: The UK is a leading advocate of the need for sugar reform, and I acknowledge that the current regime distorts international trade, and that that is to the detriment of many potential developing country suppliers. The hon. Gentleman has raised the matter on a number of occasions and he is right to do so. The specific proposals from Oxfam need to be dealt with by international agreement, and we will continue to press for that agreement and for the change and reform of the system.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): As the Minister is aware, the UK is not self-sufficient in sugar production. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) pointed out, it is not just a matter of rich farmers in East Anglia who are no longer making a profit. The issue affects all the add-on jobs in sugar beet factories, transport, haulage, subcontracting and other service industries, where many jobs are at stake. Will the Minister bear in mind the key point that this country is not self-sufficient in sugar production?

Alun Michael: Of course we are concerned about the sugar industry in this country, but it is unacceptable that the EU prices are currently three or four times the world level of prices. That is why early decisions are needed on the reform, so that all interested parties, including those in this country and in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries—the preferential suppliers—are able to plan ahead. We need the reform to take place as quickly as possible.

Sea Fishing Industry

5. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): If she will make a statement on her assessment of the prospects for a sustainable sea fishing industry in the North sea. [72347]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): It is our aim in the current common fisheries policy negotiations to achieve a more sustainable sea fish industry, and that key objective underpins our approach to the negotiations.

Lawrie Quinn: My hon. Friend will be aware that tomorrow the Whitby and district fishing training school will be opened for the first time, allowing 10 new apprentices to get the training onshore that they need for the key skills in the industry. Does he agree with the director of the school, Mr. Tony Hornigold, who said in the *Whitby Gazette:*

"People have said fishing is a dying industry. It's not a dying industry, it's a changing industry."

In that spirit, will my hon. Friend take an early opportunity in the new year to come and meet those apprentices and people from the industry, to discuss the vibrant and sustainable industry to which they can look forward in the years to come?

Mr. Morley: I agree that with the changes that the industry faces, there are still a great many opportunities, and fish is still a premium quality product for which there is a high demand from consumers. We should not say that the industry does not have a bright future. The fact that 10 apprentices are undergoing training demonstrates that there are young people who see their future in the industry. That is why my Department was glad to support the training initiative financially. I hope that my hon. Friend will pass on my warmest congratulations to everybody who has been involved in setting up the training centre in Whitby. I was invited, but I am sorry that I cannot be there because of my diary commitments. I would like to come there on some future occasion and speak to the apprentices and the members of local industry.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Why has the Minister so lost the confidence of the fishing industry that industry leaders were forced to describe his performance and that of his Scottish counterpart this week at the European Council as "surreal"? What justice, if any, has he secured for distant water fishermen? How can he have taken a decision that could cost thousands of jobs in the fishing industry without any appreciation of the financial consequences to the fishing communities? Why does he accept hook, line and sinker the Commission's proposals without considering the consequences to a mixed fishery? Why has someone of his long experience so taken his eye off the ball? How has he become the David Seaman of the fishing industry?

Mr. Morley: At the recent Council meeting I met representatives of the UK industry—the Scottish, English and Irish sectors—along with my counterpart from the Scottish Executive, and what we said to the industry was identical. There was not the slightest difference in our approach, which is a common, agreed approach, so what I find surreal is to say that there is a contrast. The reality is that we broadly support the Commission's proposals because many of our fish stocks are in a desperate state and we cannot ignore that. I made it clear to the industry that I do not discount the impact of whatever conservation measure we take, as I have repeatedly said, and I also fully recognise the problems presented by mixed stock fishery management. I am trying to find an effective, long-term and sustainable way of bringing about the recovery of those of our stocks that are under the most stress, particularly North sea cod, and take into account the views of the industry, which will be fully engaged in the process.

Common Agricultural Policy

6. **Mr Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): If she will make a statement on progress with the mid-term review of the CAP. [72348]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Discussions on the mid-term review of the CAP are continuing and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is vigorously pursuing the UK interest in reform at every opportunity.

Mr. Kirkwood: I think that every informed commentator now accepts that some change in the CAP is necessary, but will the Minister acknowledge that current levels of farm income are unsustainably low and that the uncertainty about the time that it will take to obtain a deal on CAP reform is exacerbating the situation? Obviously, the Secretary of State has urgent business in another place today, but it is vital that the Government keep the House advised of the details of the changing aspects of the policy as they evolve during the coming months. Will the Minister assure us that statements will be made as soon as any details are known, and will he also ensure that whenever CAP reform is secured it will be secured as efficiently and expeditiously as possible and that it will be done in a way that gives the UK farming industry a long-term, stable future?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman asks a series of detailed questions. We certainly want to keep the industry and the House informed. The Government believe that reform is necessary and, of course, the low level of farm incomes is a matter of concern. We want to help the UK farming industry to reform so that it has a sustainable future that is more linked to the market than to subsidy. With regard to timing, we have argued that the proposals that we welcomed in general terms do not go far enough or fast enough. Speedy reform, so that the industry knows where it is, would have our support, but we cannot determine the speed at which decisions are made.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): During the summer, I met olive producers in Greece who told me about the perverse incentive in the system that encouraged them to store many litres of olive oil at only a couple of euros a barrel, which is then sold in this country at a reduced quantity so keeping prices here artificially high. Do not such perverse incentives militate against the proper production of food of the right quality and quantity and lead to higher prices for British consumers?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. She gives an example of perverse incentives that result in higher prices for consumers without particularly helping the sustainability of agriculture in this country or in other parts of Europe. It is important that we deal with these matters, and that reform takes place quickly, in advance of the enlargement of the European Union.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Will the Minister tell us whether there is any truth in the leaked document published in *The Guardian*, which suggested that the Government had abandoned the issue of the fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy before the extension of the EU, and had said that there would be no changes of significance until at least 2007? As an attempt to explain the seriousness of the situation, will the Minister tell us how

much EU and British funding is spent on dumping surplus food, and how much greater that surplus will be when the EU is extended?

Alun Michael: I shall deal simply with the story to which the hon. Gentleman refers. No, it is not an accurate story, and the Secretary of State has written to the newspaper refuting it. There is no truth in it.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does the Minister accept that the successes to date in reforming the common agricultural policy have been nothing short of pathetic? Does he agree that it is about time that we set British farmers free from welfare dependency, and that it would be in the farmers' interests to have a stable future, free from subsidy? Surely scrapping the CAP and letting British farmers stand on their own feet would be in their interests and in the interests of my constituents, who want cheaper food immediately.

Alun Michael: It is interesting that Conservative Members were cheering some parts of my hon. Friend's question. They clearly want subsidies simply to be removed without anything being put in their place, which is an interesting shift in attitude. There are both domestic and international reasons why we must seize the opportunity to achieve a comprehensive shift in the focus of the common agricultural policy. I agree with my hon. Friend that progress has not been swift enough. It is necessary to meet the challenges of enlargement, to underwrite the EU's position in the World Trade Organisation negotiations, and, more importantly, to make our agriculture more competitive and sustainable, and to ensure that our rural economies can flourish despite the challenges ahead. I agree with my hon. Friend.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As the Secretary of State has written to *The Guardian* about this article, will she come and tell the House exactly what she has said? As she is not here today and we have no explanation for her absence, may I wish her a speedy recovery if she is ill? If she is not, may I ask where she is?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the Secretary of State is at the Environment Council, and has written to the Opposition to tell them that she is there looking after British interests. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman does not care about British interests, but we do, and the Secretary of State does. It would be ludicrous for Members of the House to ask the Secretary of State to come and answer at the Dispatch Box every time a newspaper gets a report wrong.

Departmental Accounts

7. **Mr. Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster): If she will make a statement on the auditor's qualifications regarding her Department's accounts. [72351]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The Comptroller and Auditor General's report dated 26 February 2002 drew attention to a number of weaknesses in financial systems which have since been addressed. It must be remembered that the report refers to the preparation and audit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's resource accounts for 2000–01, which took place during a very difficult time for the former Ministry, and subsequently the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The foot and mouth outbreak was at its peak, machinery of government changes were in progress, and many of the Department's staff were redeployed to help deal with the exceptional increase in work loads which arose during that period. Nevertheless, steps have been taken to address the issues raised and, in particular, to embed resource accountancy into systems for budgetary control and financial management.

Mr. Field: They say that a week is a long time in politics, but I must confess that, having tabled this question three months ago, I had to rack my brain to work out what it was that I was trying to get to the bottom of. I am not sure that we have got any closer to the answer after the Minister's response. Will he tell the House how the unquantified future costs of foot and mouth disease will be taken account of in future accounts?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman is probably referring to some matters related to the outbreak that have led to, for example, discussion about invoices and submissions for payment. They give rise to a contingent liability, which will be disclosed in the published resource account. The precise figures cannot therefore be given until they are finalised.

Flood Defence Schemes

9. **Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): What guidelines she gives to flood defence schemes in flood plains. [72353]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): DEFRA provides a wide range of guidance to promote the development of economically, technically and environmentally sound and sustainable solutions to flood management and coastal erosion problems. It has been developed over the years, through extensive consultation, and is kept under constant review in the light of research and other policy developments.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: I am sure that the Under-Secretary knows about the Parrett catchment project in my constituency. The Environment Agency, which is charged with the work of flood defence in my patch, is finding it harder to understand where it is going. The Parrett catchment project is presenting schemes and ideas that step on the Environment Agency's toes. Will the Under-Secretary please ensure that there are clear lines of understanding about who is responsible for what in my constituency? We are beginning to reach the stage when people, especially landowners, are worrying about who is in charge of flood defence schemes in Bridgwater and west Somerset.

Mr. Morley: There is no confusion about who is in charge of flood schemes in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. The Parrett catchment strategy, project

and study is a good example of bringing together local people and the wide range of different groups with different interests. In the past, those differences led to severe conflict in the area. It has been resolved by bringing people together. All groups and individuals who have been involved in the Parrett catchment initiative deserve credit. Of course, they are entitled to present ideas. Some may not be feasible; some may be long term and others may be relevant to the strategies for improving flood defences in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

The Environment Agency is considering some of those ideas, but ultimately, it will present the plans, and my Department will scrutinise them to ascertain their environmental impact, the cost-benefit analysis and whether they are technically suitable.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I fully support the Parrett catchment project, which, as the Minister said, is doing an extremely good job of bringing together disparate voices in the Somerset levels communities and perhaps showing a way forward for the rest of the country in inland flood defence.

Earlier, the Under-Secretary referred to the use of land for water retention. I believe that a significant problem remains. Of course, it is possible to use stewardship schemes, but will that constitute a sustainable income for farmers in future? Can the Under-Secretary assure farmers that they will have a sustainable income for sustainable practice on the levels?

Mr. Morley: It should be made clear that a stewardship scheme is not meant to be an alternative subsidy to the CAP. We are trying to move away from production support. The idea of stewardship schemes is recognising that farmers have land management skills and can provide a wide range of benefits, of which water management could be one. The payment reflects the job that they do. It will be geared to that commitment. I have made it clear that I believe that there is scope for that. We have to examine each scheme on its merits because, in some cases, water retention schemes require large areas of land and they may not be the solution to flood control.

However, the Somerset levels area, which is internationally important, is already in an environmentally sensitive areas scheme and has a range of different support structures, which could be integrated to achieve a range of benefits, including nature conservation, sustainable farming and flood defence. The Parrett catchment scheme and group are playing an important role in that.

Foot and Mouth Disease

10. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What procedure exists for calling on the use of the armed forces in a future outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [72354]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The armed forces would be alerted immediately if a case of foot and mouth disease was confirmed. The procedure is set out in DEFRA's interim contingency plan, which is published on DEFRA's website along with an electronic mailbox for comments.

Mr. Osborne: I thank the Minister for that answer. When the permanent secretary of DEFRA appeared before the Public Accounts Committee earlier this year, he confirmed that the 29-day delay in bringing out the Army in last year's foot and mouth outbreak was because the Prime Minister's authorisation was not forthcoming. What would the Prime Minister's role be in any future use of the Army in a foot and mouth outbreak? Can he be kept as far away from the process as possible?

Mr. Morley: If the hon. Gentleman had taken the trouble to read the Anderson report, he would know how crucial the role of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was in co-ordinating the total Government response, and how successful that was.

I recall well, having lived through the foot and mouth epidemic in the days of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the original call for the use of the Army. People did not understand the way in which the Army role would be played. Those calling for the immediate use of the Army thought that it would be used simply to cart animals around, dig holes and undertake the sort of work that plenty of contractors could do. The value of the Army is in logistical control and command, in which it has particular skills. The time to bring it in is when the size of the epidemic justifies that. I should say that the Army was put on alert within days of the outbreak.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way to ensure that we do not have to call out the armed forces again, that we do not have to kill hundreds of thousands of animals and that we do not have to pay £3 billion in compensation, is to develop a suitable foot and mouth vaccine and then routinely to vaccinate livestock throughout Europe?

Mr. Morley: I certainly agree that the vaccine will clearly have a greater role to play in the future control of epidemics. Indeed, vaccine technology has advanced from the date of the last outbreak to where we are now. Within the contingency plan we recognise that more work needs to be done on vaccine development. The Anderson report and the Royal Society report recommended that emergency vaccination should be moved up the options agenda. That is exactly what we will do in our future contingency planning.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Can the Minister confirm that the clearest lesson from all the foot and mouth inquiries that have reported has been that the State Veterinary Service needs to be as strong as possible? Will the hon. Gentleman say whether or not the moratorium on hiring state vets has been lifted?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I can confirm that the moratorium has been lifted. The SVS is an important part of our response to any sort of disease control. It provides advice on the prevention of disease as well.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I am sure that the Minister will be aware that yesterday, at the Select Committee,

the author of the Royal Society report, Sir Brian Follett, was openly critical of the Government's efforts in scientific terms to improve animal welfare and to counter diseases that threaten the livestock industry. What will the Minister do to respond to Sir Brian's sage criticisms?

Mr. Morley: We will respond in detail, especially to Sir Brian's report, which was a very good piece of work. We accept the main thrust of the recommendations. I have not seen the details of his comments at the meeting of the Select Committee, but I will make a point of reading them. There is a debate at the Royal Society that will involve Dr. Anderson and myself. I am ensuring that all the members of the Select Committee will receive an invite to attend if they so wish.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): One thing that came out clearly from Dr. Ian Anderson's report was the inadequacy of contingency planning in this country compared with the plans put in place in, for example, the Netherlands. The Minister has referred to the Government's interim contingency plan. Can he say now, 12 months after the last confirmed case of foot and mouth disease, and nearly four months after the Anderson report, when he expects to make public the Government's final contingency plan that can be open to public discussion and debate in the House?

Mr. Morley: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Anderson report said that the outbreak that we experienced in this country was unprecedented on any international scale, and that no country's contingency plan was in a position to cope with an outbreak of such a type and on such a scale. In fairness, that should be recognised.

We recognise that we must re-write our contingency plans. We must rethink many of our approaches given the experience of the epidemic. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, we have produced our immediate response, which is the interim strategy, so that we have a strategy in place. We are under way with the definitive strategy and contingency plan, which will be uprated. It will change because that is the nature of it. That involves a great deal of consultation and discussion. That is right and proper because we want to be open and transparent about this. We intend to bring forward the completed conclusions as quickly as possible and to encourage as much involvement and debate as possible.

Animal Infections

11. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What recent assessments she has made of the effects of the transport of animals on the spread of infection. [72355]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Department has carried out preliminary veterinary and economic assessments of the 20-day standstill rule on animal movements and these are published on the Department's website. A comprehensive cost benefit analysis and risk assessment is now being commissioned, as recommended by the inquiries into the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

Paul Flynn: Is not it true that the main reason why foot and mouth spread more rapidly here than in any other country was that between the time of infection and the time of its detection, infected animals went to at least six marts, possibly coming into contact with 1 million other animals? Is not it right that the Government encourage farmers to use other methods of selling animals, such as through the internet, videos and direct sales, as they did during the foot and mouth crisis, rather than by making journeys to market? Is not it outrageous of the Opposition, who demand better methods to ensure that foot and mouth does not return and spread and that other infections do not come to this country, to oppose the Government on a sensible moderate scheme for the 20-day rule and to support farmers who flagrantly break the rule?

Mr. Morley: I agree. The 20-day rule is an essential part of disease control strategy. It was recommended in the Anderson report and the Royal Society report. We have modified the details of the 20-day rule to take into account the real burdens on farmers in relation to the patterns of their animal movements. However, as I said to the industry, there is no going back to the situation pre-FMD. There will have to be movement controls.

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency is commissioning an independent risk assessment to consider whether 20 days is appropriate or whether other amendments could be made in the light of representations. However, the rule is essential. The disease was spread by widespread animal movements and, in the case of Northern Ireland, by illegal sheep movements. So we must have tight controls. The Opposition's position on the 20-day rule in last night's debate was irresponsible. They did not recognise the real need that in order to combat disease there has to be action by all concerned. That means the Government, local authorities and agencies, but the livestock industry must play its part as well.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): What answer would the Minister give to farmers in my constituency who think it illogical to have lax controls at airports and sea ports, where few resources are committed to prevent foot and mouth entering the country, while farmers are continually hamstrung in their livestock businesses by a rigid 20-day rule, which makes their business unviable?

Mr. Morley: To be blunt, for some it is just an excuse. Controls at entry are important. We do not discount them and take them very seriously. Indeed, we have just committed an extra £1.5 million for additional checks at points of entry. We are considering all methods to ensure that we can strengthen controls at all borders and in all areas through which meat travels to enter this country. The truth is, however, that whatever we spend and whatever we do, we cannot give a 100 per cent. guarantee that some disease will not get into the country. In that respect, although we recognise that we must play our part in border controls, and we will, the livestock industry must play its part as well. Movement

stops are an essential part of that. Those people who are not prepared to accept them put the whole livestock industry at risk. Given the fact that the taxpayer has to pick up the bill, the industry must recognise the need for it to play its part in minimising the problem.

River Avon (Water Extraction)

12. **Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): What agreement she has reached on water abstraction from the upper reaches of the Hampshire Avon; and if she will make a statement. [72356]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): In June this year the Environment Agency, English Nature, the Office of Water Services and Wessex Water agreed a programme of measures that will reduce abstractions in three areas, including the upper reaches of the Hampshire Avon.

Mr. Key: I am grateful to the Minister, his officials and all the agencies involved for coming up with a compromise solution. However, does he agree that it is not the long-term answer? The problem is replicated around the country. The simple answer is that we are all wasting far too much water. We are transporting it, abstracting it and throwing it away. Will he do all he can to ensure a public education programme to stop wasting water?

Mr. Morley: I can give the hon. Gentleman a bit more reassurance than that. He will probably be aware that it is our intention to introduce a new water Bill that will focus very much on abstraction control and statutory requirements to ensure that water is not wasted and is used properly. I am sure that he will welcome those measures and I look forward to his support when we introduce the Bill.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please give the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 21 OCTOBER—Remaining stages of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 22 OCTOBER—Opposition Day [Unallotted Day]. Until 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Crisis in Affordable Housing". Followed by a debate entitled "Crisis in Nuclear Power and Development of a Sustainable Energy Market". Both debates arise on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats.

WEDNESDAY 23 OCTOBER—Opposition Day [19th Allotted Day]. Until 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "The Government's Mismanagement of the National Lottery".

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock.

THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER—Continuation of the debate on local government finance formula grant distribution on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Followed by a debate on control of asbestos in the workplace on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 28 OCTOBER—Opposition Day [20th Allotted Day] There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER—Debate on motions relating to the Modernisation Committee report on reforming the House of Commons and the Procedure Committee report on parliamentary questions.

WEDNESDAY 30 OCTOBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Enterprise Bill.

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER—Debate on defence in the UK on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 1 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The House will wish to know that, subject to the progress of business the House will prorogue on Thursday 7 November and the new Session will begin on Wednesday 13 November.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 23 October the second meeting of the Committee on the Convention on the Future of Europe will take place to consider the Third and Fourth Report of the United Kingdom representatives to the convention.

Mr. Forth: As ever, I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving us the business for the next two weeks. As he is all too aware, as a result of the re-imposition of direct rule in Northern Ireland, a ministerial team of five is now accountable to this House for what they do in Northern Ireland. In the light of that, is the right hon. Gentleman prepared urgently to look at the allocation of time for parliamentary questions, particularly for Northern Ireland, but also for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, given that that Minister has an enormous range of responsibilities that are of direct interest to hon. Members and their constituents? I hope that the Leader of the House agrees that this is an urgent matter. I am sure that it could be agreed through the usual channels very rapidly, but I hope that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that it is very important that the House exercise its responsibilities with regard to the ministerial team in Northern Ireland given the regrettable change of circumstances.

While I acknowledge that the Leader of the House has now given further time for the local government finance formula debate—a matter that he, and you, Mr. Speaker, know greatly exercised the House when we saw that debate shrinking—can he give us any guarantees about the length of time now available for that important debate, as there must still be a long list of Members wishing to participate in this important matter? While I do not in any way want to diminish the importance of asbestos as a subject, it might be worth reconsidering whether asbestos really should encroach on the time available to debate the local government finance formula. Is the Leader of the House prepared, even at this stage, to look at the matter again and allow more time for local government even if it is at the expense of an immediate debate on asbestos?

On 29 October, we are to have a debate on the so-called modernisation of the House. Sadly, as the Leader of the House knows, because he chairs the Modernisation Committee, this is not a matter that has been agreed by all parties, as used to be the case in the past. I understand that he is presenting a number of proposals that have not been agreed to. Is it too late, even at this stage, for further discussions? When will we see the wording of proposals arising from very controversial suggestions by the right hon. Gentleman's Committee? Will the right hon. Gentleman at the very least guarantee that when we have a debate there will be not just ample time for it but, equally important, an opportunity for votes to take place on matters that remain controversial?

May I appeal, even now, to the Leader of the House? We are very keen to discuss topical questions here, as their lordships are already able to do in the other place. Indeed, I understand that their opportunities are to be extended even further—opportunities that we have never had.

I should like more agreement to be reached than has been the case hitherto. Is it too late? When will we see the right hon. Gentleman's proposals?

Mr. Cook: Let me first say what a relief it is to see the architect of the AS-level still in his place. I will not disguise that from him, given the prominent part he played yesterday in the trouncing of his leader—

Mr. Forth: I did not say a word.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman did not need to say a word. He played a prominent part nevertheless. There was concern on these Benches about his welfare

[Mr. Cook]

overnight; we are delighted that he did not wake up to find that his appointment was "not worth the paper on which it was written."

The right hon. Gentleman asked about Northern Ireland. I congratulate my two colleagues who have been appointed to the Northern Ireland team: I am sure they will pursue their task with great diligence. We will of course look at ways of ensuring that the House can be kept fully aware of decisions they make, and that they are held accountable.

The right hon. Gentleman raised two questions about the questions rota, suggesting that more time should be allowed for questions on Northern Ireland and to the Deputy Prime Minister. I have to say that the time is finite. I am happy to look at ways of providing more time, but I need to hear proposals for less time to be allowed to someone else. Allowing more time for some matters means allowing less for others, and I assume that the right hon. Gentleman would not like time to be taken from the time allowed for the Leader of the House to answer questions. We are happy to consider the suggestion, but these are difficult issues and I have to strike a balance between the different Departments whose representatives must give answers to the House.

I am pleased that we have found additional time for the debate on the formula for local government. The House will recall that it was raised with me during business questions in July, and that I took the initiative by saying that there must be a debate. I regret the fact that Tuesday's debate shrank, although I do not regret the fact that we heard three very important statements which I think we all agree that we had to hear. We have acted to provide for a further debate on the Floor of the House. We will ensure that the time is protected, and that at least three full hours will be allowed.

Mr. Forth: Three hours?

Mr. Cook: Three hours on top of the hour that has already been provided amounts to a substantial wodge of time.

The right hon. Gentleman suggested that we drop the asbestos debate. I would not want him to get into any more trouble than he is in already with his leader, and I should perhaps draw his attention to the fact that the Leader of the Opposition wrote to us requesting a debate on asbestos on the Floor of the House. He may wish to consult with the Leader of the Opposition about the withdrawal of that letter, but I personally advise him to keep quiet about the matter.

It is, of course, never too late for further discussions about modernisation. I immensely enjoy the discussions I currently have during every hour of my working day about the modernisation proposals; but there comes a time when it is necessary to reach a decision. This matter has been before the House for nearly a year, and I think it is time for a decision. I very much hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to assure us that when we decide on, in particular, sitting hours, there will be a free vote for the Opposition as well as for us.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I suggest that a debate on the funding of democracy would offer the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) another chance to give us the opportunity of hearing his forthright views? There seems to be a curious amount of amnesia on the Conservative Benches in relation to state funding. It appears to have escaped Conservative Members' notice that the Conservative party has received £20 million from the taxpayer since its defeat in 1997.

If we are to preserve and enhance the reputation of politics, Parliament and Government, is it not extremely important for us to face up to the issue of state funding of democracy? Has the Leader of the House had a chance to see the IPPR report, which I understand the chairman of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), has already endorsed? Is it not urgent that we look at this? We surely cannot wait for the Electoral Commission to complete its work on this, which I understand may take 12 to 18 months. Does the Leader of the House recognise that there is a widespread perception that politics is being grossly influenced by the way in which large donors of various sorts seek to gain influence and access? In particular, will he look at the report in today's *Financial Times,* the headline of which is

"Tory donor 'urged Duncan Smith to ditch chairman'",

as a clear example of a way in which this can cause great concern and suspicion among the electorate? Can he be sure that no donor will try to ensure the departure of the Conservative spokesman because his performance is always so enjoyable in the House?

Mr. Cook: On the funding of political parties, I understand the anxieties to make progress, but it would be valuable for us to have the report of the Electoral Commission. After all, the House appointed the Electoral Commission to advise us on such matters. It will have important weight and authority in its contribution to the debate. I saw the report from IPPR and will study it with care. I also heard the director of IPPR being interviewed on the radio, in which he made the telling observation that the first Prime Minister ever elected with help from state funding was Lady Thatcher who benefited from Short money while in opposition, as indeed the Conservative party rightly and properly does today. That money is there to make sure our parliamentary system works better. Since that party already receives state funding I wish that it would adopt a rather more open approach to the debate on other parties.

I saw the article in the *Financial Times.* I am in no position to verify it since, sadly, I was not invited to attend the meeting between the Tory donor and the leader of the Tory party. I hope I carry with me all members of the shadow Cabinet when I say that if any Tory donor should suggest to the leader that he sack any of them, the appropriate course is to show him the door.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does The Leader of the House share my view that undemocratic quangos are capable of undermining Government policy? For example, although North Derbyshire tertiary college was due to be closed or have its name changed, the jobs were to remain according to a tin-pot undemocratic quango called the Derbyshire learning and skills council. That promise has not been kept. As a result

negotiations are already under way about sending people down the road on to the dole queue. It is high time that the Minister responsible for further education dealt with this matter to make sure that promises made by that tin-pot quango are kept.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes his comments in his characteristic trenchant way and they will be heard vigorously in Derbyshire as they have been heard here. I am not in a position to respond in detail to the particular points that he raised, but I shall make sure that the Minister at the Department for Education and Skills has them drawn to his attention.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): May I ask the Leader of the House—as someone who is trenchant in his defence of the rights of Members of Parliament vis-à-vis the Executive, and someone with a modernising agenda—to encourage Ministers to respond far more promptly to letters of inquiry from Members of the House of Commons? In early July I wrote to Health Ministers about a most important public health matter in Sutton Coldfield and this morning, more than three months later, I had a response. I hope that the Leader of the House will bear in mind that a three-month delay is far too long and that civil servants and Ministers must ratchet up their agenda the importance of responding promptly to Members of Parliament when they raise important issues with them.

Mr. Cook: Of course, as Leader of the House I can only concur with the general sentiment that Members should have a reply to a parliamentary question or letter as quickly as possible. However, I invite the House to bear in mind the real pressures, particularly on the Department of Health. Questions to the Department of Health, and indeed many other Departments, have increased by about 50 per cent. in recent times. I know that the Department of Health is increasing staff resources to deal with the problem. We shall certainly endeavour to make sure we give as early advice as we can, but as mature members of the political community we must recognise the real pressures involved.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If the matter is not fully cleared up this afternoon by the Defence Secretary, could there be a statement next week on the Congressional Budget Office report, which purports to say that Britain has committed 10,000 troops and £5 billion to a war against Iraq? Specifically, the CBO assumes that

"two-thirds of a British air wing would be part of the Heavy Ground force, as well as British naval contingent of 21 ships, as in Desert Storm."

The CBO's estimates of the costs

"incorporate the assumption that the United States will provide limited logistical support".

There ought at least to be comment on that, most properly from the Foreign Office or the Prime Minister.

Mr. Cook: I think I can help my hon. Friend to clear up the point now. First, there is no such commitment by the British Government. Secondly, the paper from which he quotes—as he has fairly indicated—is a paper not from the American Government but from the Congressional Budget Office. To be fair to the Congressional Budget Office, it makes it perfectly plain that these are its assumptions and not British Government commitments.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): May I return to Northern Ireland? Quite rightly, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland used the first possible opportunity to make a statement to the House on Tuesday about the suspension of the devolved institutions. It is clear that, this time, we could be in for a long haul, because previously there have not been two additional Ministers appointed. In the circumstances, may we have a guarantee from the Leader of the House that there will be a full debate on the crisis in Northern Ireland before the House rises?

Mr. Cook: May I respond first to the right hon. Gentleman's last point, because I anticipate that he may be the first of a number today to raise it? Time between now and the date of prorogation that I have announced—7 November—is very tight. It is extremely important that we fulfil the commitments that we have, which we willingly accept, to meet the requirements of the Standing Orders for Opposition days, of which there are a number outstanding. We have four Bills, to which there will be Lords amendments, before we rise. I must say to the right hon. Gentleman, and to anyone else thinking of asking the question, that there is no time for additional debate between now and prorogation.

On the general point that the right hon. Gentleman raises, we are fully seized of the gravity and importance of this development. I have no doubt that, over a period of time, the House will return to the question of Northern Ireland; whether in debate or in statements remains to be seen. Certainly the House will be right to expect to be fully involved. In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, he has done everything possible to keep the House informed.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the role and activities of IPPR? In the aftermath of its report proposing a cap on donations to political parties, IPPR makes no comment on its own uncapped donations from the corporate sector.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes a robust point and I should be surprised if a letter from the IPPR were not winging its way towards him by tomorrow. I can only say to him that there are aspects of the report that do not immediately commend themselves to the Government or, I suspect, to any other party in this Chamber.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): The discovery of a Republican spy ring at Stormont—in the wake of the raid on Castlereagh police station and the arrest of suspects in Colombia—in addition to the ongoing violence on the streets of Northern Ireland has produced a huge decrease in support for the Belfast agreement. This was confirmed this morning in a BBC report in which a poll indicated that only 56 per cent. of people now support the Belfast agreement, as opposed to over 70 per cent. in 1998. Further to the request of the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay), could I appeal to the Leader of the House for an urgent debate in Government time on the circumstances that made

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untenable the continuance of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Sinn Fein/IRA Ministers within that Assembly?

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the importance of the developments to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Indeed, in his statement on Tuesday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland stressed the fact that events at Castlereagh and in Colombia had contributed to the decline in confidence in the peace process and the structures for Government in Northern Ireland. As my right hon. Friend said in his statement, the time has come when those who are participating in the peace process must decide whether they are committing themselves wholly to that track. If the peace process is to succeed, paramilitaries on both sides must recognise that the case for violence and for trying to resolve these issues through violence is over, and that now is the time for all to commit themselves to the peace process, and solely to the peace process.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Is my right hon. Friend aware that yesterday a cross-party group of Members of Parliament presented a petition at Downing street calling for tougher regulation on fireworks? We understand that the Government have made announcements this week on bringing in new regulations, which we welcome. Would it be possible, however, given the sheer volume of people who signed the petition, for a Minister to come to the House to detail the new measures that the Government wish to introduce to deal with antisocial behaviour connected with fireworks?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a serious issue that is about to become very topical. There can be no Member of the House who has not, at some time or other, seen a constituent who has suffered injury from fireworks. My hon. Friend is correct that the Government have made proposals for controlling fireworks that are most prone to abuse or to cause injury. Those measures will, I believe, take effect from next year, and there will be opportunities for the House to consider them as the Government bring forward measures to implement them. In the mean time, I am sure that all hon. Members will use the press in their constituencies to consider how to provide the publicity to ensure that those handling fireworks recognise that they are potentially very dangerous explosives that must be handled with care, responsibility and judgment.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the courtesy of the House being informed if a Secretary of State cannot be here to answer questions is observed in the future, as it was not observed today? Will the Leader of the House also please reconsider the Modernisation Committee debate on 29 October? It is not essential that that issue be debated on that day; it is essential that Northern Ireland be debated very soon.

Mr. Cook: We have to make our own judgments as to what is the best allocation of time, and I think that the House will want to address a number of modernisation issues. As a matter of fact, it is essential that we have a debate on modernisation before proroguing, otherwise the House will be sitting until 10 o'clock on Thursdays in the next Session, because that order is sessional and must be addressed. There are reasons of necessity why we have to have a debate before the House rises.

On the hon. Gentleman's other point, I am advised that those on the Opposition Front Bench were informed that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs would be absent. In fairness to my right hon. Friend, she is attending the Environment Council in Europe, which has very important business relating to this country. If she were absent from that meeting, I suspect that she would be criticised by the House for coming here rather than going to Brussels.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The Leader of the House is aware that this week the Irish people will be voting in a referendum on the Nice treaty. Although not wishing to interfere in that process, many of us hope that they will vote yes. Bearing in mind the interest of the Leader of the House in the enlargement process in his work as Foreign Secretary and its importance to the rest of Europe, could time be set aside for a debate next week, or at least before the House rises, so that we can debate how to champion the cause even further?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend tosses me what I think is a firework that I must handle with care and responsibility. As he rightly says, the Irish public would quite properly resent any outside interference in their process. On enlargement, however, I have no difficulty in saying to my hon. Friend that the Government wholeheartedly support the enlargement process and have been one of the champions arguing for enlargement and the access of the countries in central and eastern Europe.

I think that we in the European Union are inclined to underrate the extent to which the possibility of membership of the European Union has helped those countries transform their economy and alleviated some of the longstanding ethnic tensions that they have realised they have to put behind them as a condition of membership. These are welcome developments. Given the painful decisions that those countries have taken, it remains incumbent on us to ensure that those decisions are rewarded with membership.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate on the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and, in particular, the delays in providing guidance? Is he aware that there is a problem with the rationing of photodynamic therapy for patients suffering from wet age-related macular degeneration, or AMD? My constituent, Jack Tolley, of Bladon, is going progressively blind. His general practitioner has recommended him for treatment, but the Oxford eye hospital says that it cannot carry it out because the funding from his own primary care trust is not there. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that that is particularly iniquitous because patients in Reading are funded for that treatment at the Oxford eye hospital. He may like to know that the North East Oxfordshire NHS PCT has said that because

"resources per capita . . . are the lowest or next to lowest in the country. For this reason we need to make invidious decisions about treatment priorities which are due to inadequate resources."

Could we have an urgent debate and early guidance from NICE so that people who are going progressively blind do not have to wait for their treatment?

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the controversy to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Plainly, the sooner it is resolved the better, from everyone's point of view. I have two general observations. First, we set up NICE precisely because it is surely right that it should be the scientific and the medical experts, with some independent assessment, who come to a judgment. These are not matters that we are qualified to judge and they are not suitable to be resolved on the Floor of the House. Secondly, I hear the hon. Gentleman's complaints about poor funding. Of course, it is the Government's understanding that we have to make further progress in raising funding within the national health service. We have carried through a massive increase in funding since we inherited the record of the previous Conservative Government. At the Conservative party conference, the Conservative leadership said that it was not committed to matching our increases in health spending. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can support his leadership in refusing to match our spending and at the same time complain that we are not spending enough.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Will the Leader of the House consider timetabling at the earliest opportunity a debate on the future of United Kingdom manufacturing? He may feel a sense of déjà-vu, but there have been profound changes within our industrial base, and Parliament is in danger of failing to respond to those changes. In the past year, there have been forced large-scale redundancies in Leigh and 1,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost, the latest due to the closure of the Bentwood textiles factory, which has led to the loss of more than 300 skilled jobs. That raises real issues about the future of the UK textile industry and whether the European Union tax regime is working in our national interests. There is real concern out there about both the ease with which companies can seemingly relocate away from the UK and the quality of the redundancy packages offered to people when such relocations occur. I urge my right hon. Friend to give hon. Members the opportunity to air those concerns on the Floor of the House at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Cook: I am distressed to hear of the experience that my hon. Friend describes in his constituency and I fully understand that the matters that he has raised must be of grave concern to his constituents. I am aware of the interest on both sides of the House in a discussion of manufacturing. It is a matter that has been aired before. I draw attention to the fact that we are rapidly approaching six full days' debate on the Queen's Speech, which traditionally provides an opportunity to discuss industry and the economy. My hon. Friend and other hon. Members may wish to consider whether these are matters that could be pursued in that context.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Would the Leader of the House make a statement prior to the modernisation debate on the possible impact of the modernisation on the working hours and income of the staff of the House and the police? He may be aware that it is feared that those staff may well end up worse off after that modernisation process.

Mr. Cook: If there are concerns on income, that is a matter that can be pursued through the usual negotiating channels, which are well developed within the House of Commons. I am sure that the House of Commons Commission will be willing to consider any bona fide and genuine concerns that there might be—I say that as a member of the Commission. However, I am not immediately aware that there would be a significant impact on the hours of the staff. If he is referring to the Modernisation Committee's report, it is true that we make a vigorous case for thinking that the House would be wise to start earlier in the day than at present and that that would have a consequence for when we conclude our business at the end of the day. We do not go so far as the Opposition, who suggested that we should sit from 9 am and stop at 5 pm, but we are suggesting 11.30 am until 7 pm.

We also recommended that, because a number of hon. Members will wish to continue working on the premises, catering and other facilities such as the Library should remain open. so I would not apprehend any immediate and sharp reduction in hours.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I return to the issue raised by the Father of the House during business questions. My point relates to the article by Oonagh Blackman in today's edition of *The Mirror*. We might want to take issue with the basis on which the US Congressional Budget Office speculated on the costs of a war against Iraq. The following statement from its report ought to cause this House real concern:

"Only the British have thus far indicated their intention to contribute troops."

We have had a succession of statements, from the Prime Minister and other Ministers, saying that the UK has not made any such commitment. Either the US Congress is being misled, or information is being withheld from this House. May we ask the Prime Minister to make it clear to this House whether there is any grounds at all for the certainty with which this commitment of UK troops is referred to in the report to the US Congress?

Mr. Cook: There is no commitment made, and can be no commitment made, because no decision has yet been reached. As the Prime Minister has repeatedly said to the House—I fully support him in this policy objective—it is the objective of British foreign policy to make sure that it is progressed through the United Nations. At the moment, there are discussions within the United Nations on what resolution might be approved, and I think it may well be possible that those discussions will result in a resolution. At the moment, no decision is required of us, and no commitment has been made by us. Military action is not imminent; nor is it inevitable. I very much hope that, at the end of the day, we will succeed through the United Nations process of satisfactorily disarming Saddam Hussein and removing his ambition for weapons of mass destruction. However,

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we also need him to heed the UN obligations that he has previously had put upon him, and any fresh UN resolution that is adopted.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will the Leader of the House keep an open mind as to the allocation of time for debating local government funding, given the concerns expressed by Members, the interests of their constituents, the scale of the proposed changes to funding, the effect on local services, and the interests of those such as the chairman of the Hertfordshire police authority, who wrote to Ministers and MPs saying that, in due course, changes in funding will result in the loss of 300 police officers in Hertfordshire? These are very big changes. Can we find sufficient time, so that all these anxieties can be heard?

Mr. Cook: Yes, although I am aware that my right hon. Friend has repeatedly stressed to the House that no local authority will be worse off. Of course, there is room for debate as to who is best off in terms of the increased amounts. Having said that, I admit to the House that I see no realistic possibility that I can provide satisfactory time on the Floor for every Member who wishes to make a contribution, through a speech, to this issue. It is simply not possible to reconcile that with the finite character of time. I have twice tried to provide generous time for this debate. On Tuesday, that opportunity was waylaid by the need for statements; it will not be so waylaid next Thursday, when a second opportunity will arise. I believe that, in all fairness, we have tried hard to provide adequate opportunity for the House to ventilate this subject.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that—despite the impression given by the shadow Leader of the House—the Modernisation Committee has done everything possible in the past year to try to reach a consensus? Is it not true that some of his friends on the Labour Benches wanted to go much further in respect of matters such as the modest overspill proposal? People such as me believe that we should have a five-year Parliament, with all legislation being introduced in a sensible, phased way over that period. That would ensure a better programme, better scrutiny and better legislation.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has played a distinguished part in the Select Committee. He is absolutely right—we have sought whenever we can to achieve consensus. All members of the Committee will accept that I have made real efforts to get as many members on board as possible. There are one or two areas on which we disagree—that is not surprising—but we have achieved substantial consensus on the way forward.

On the issue of carry-over to which my hon. Friend refers, I stress that I do not see it as related in any way to increasing the volume of legislation before the House; I see it as necessary to make sure that the House can do a proper job of scrutiny. The real problem in scrutinising Government legislation is finding enough time in which to do it. If we want more time to do it, we must have a longer time-horizon. That is the value of carry-over to the House, and it is for the House's sake that we should adopt it when we meet on 29 October.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Leader of the House will know that about six of his ministerial colleague, including the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, attended the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg at the end of August. He will further know that that international conference debated and discussed some of the most vital issues affecting the future of our globe. Surely the House should have an opportunity to discuss these important matters. Bearing in mind the fair point that he made about the pressure on business between now and Prorogation, will he assure us that the matter will be debated on the Floor of the House, if not before then immediately after the beginning of the new Session?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman is realistic in understanding that we cannot debate the matter before prorogation, but I assure him that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is keen for the House to have an opportunity to question her and discuss the matter, and that the issue of a statement was contemplated. The House will always be faced with the problem of catching up after three months in which it has not been sitting. Indeed, we saw that on Monday when we had three statements—[HON. MEMBERS: "Tuesday."] Sorry, Tuesday. Those statements could not be moved and necessarily took precedence over any other statement. I would argue that that is a very strong case for the House coming back in September instead of the system whereby we do not meet for three months. Had we come back in September, I am absolutely sure that there would have been a statement on Johannesburg.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Would the Leader of the House, in his mission for modernisation, consider investigating the modernisation of the television facilities available in the House to allow hon. Members to receive digital television channels, especially those such as BBC2 Wales or BBC Scotland, which will allow us to monitor the media in our nations and regions? Would that not have the additional merit of allowing people—such as those hon. Members who were lucky enough to be in the Wales Office last night—to watch some top-quality international football?

Mr. Cook: One of the advantages that I have as United Kingdom Leader of the House is the ability to support whichever team is doing best, and I congratulate the Welsh team on its success. I shall convey to the House authorities my hon. Friend's comments in relation to television services.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): First, will the Leader of the House confirm that there will be a Government statement on the Government's response to the Anderson inquiry on 5 November, as leaked today to Plaid Cymru? Secondly, he is no doubt aware of a little local difficulty concerning the proposed change of membership of the Committee of Selection. He is aware that this is due to the increasing frustration felt in the minority parties about lack of access to Committees and

institutions of the House. Must we continue to oppose that as private business, or will we be given an early opportunity to debate our grievances about the treatment of minority parties at the hands of the House?

Mr. Cook: I am very much aware of the grievance of the minority parties on the question of appointments to Committees. The hon. Gentleman and I have corresponded on the matter on several occasions, and I will continue to look for a solution to it. There will be plenty of procedural opportunities for him to make his point.

On the Anderson report, the Government will, of course, respond to it, and that response will be shared with the House. It is unusual, however, for the Government to respond as soon as the leak is out and before the report has been published.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I return to the story in the *The Mirror* about the war bill? Although I welcome the Leader of the House's positive comments on the United Nations route, I must point out the importance of this issue to the House. If the document concerned says that President Bush has been guaranteed that Britain will send troops to fight a United States-led war and makes other explicit statements to which my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) referred—in addition, the Congressional Budget Office report estimates that the cost to this country might be £5 billion—it is imperative that the House has the opportunity to question a Minister or the Prime Minister on the matter. We have been told time and again that no decisions have been taken, but the Americans appear to think that they have been. Five billion pounds is a lot of money, and we have outstanding public sector pay claims, such as those from the firefighters and the nurses, and I am sure that that money would cover much of their claims.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an issue that has been of deep concern to a number of my hon. Friends. I can only repeat that the Congressional Budget Office is, of course, entitled to come to what assumptions it wishes, but those are its assumptions. They do not reflect any commitment that has been given by Her Majesty's Government, nor could we make any commitment until we take a decision, and no decision has been taken on action. I very much hope that it will be possible for us to succeed in getting the UN to pressurise Iraq successfully to accept its obligations to the UN. Every sane Member would accept that that is the best way forward, but it depends on co-operation from Iraq.

As to opportunities to debate the issue further, I draw the House's attention to the fact that there will be a debate on defence today and that there will be another in two weeks' time. There are plenty of opportunities for Members who wish to do so to press the Ministers responsible for defence for clarity on this matter. However, I think that those Ministers will confirm what I have said to the House.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate on the private finance initiative so that the House can have the benefit of the lively debate that we saw at the Labour party conference? Perhaps the Government could explain the motion that was so enthusiastically adopted by that conference. If he finds time for that debate, will he arrange for the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to open it, so that we can hear the Government's argument at its best and hear a repeat of the bravura performance at Blackpool?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman's point was rather laboured. I am always happy to listen to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury or, indeed, to any member of the Treasury team. They will also be interested to hear from the hon. Gentleman or any of his colleagues if they wish to nominate which hospital or school projects in their constituencies they would like to have halted because they do not approve of the PFI process.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I welcome the modernisation proposals that my right hon. Friend published over the summer, but will he tell the House what progress has been made with respect to the use of Westminster Hall for debates on issues that cut across Government Departments and that a range of Ministers could attend? Would not a good start be a debate on youth policy to which many Ministers could be brought together to answer questions on that important topic?

Mr. Cook: I aware of my hon. Friend's interest in the subject. Indeed, he wrote to me some time ago, and I am pleased that we have been able to respond to the demand from Members—and from Ministers responsible for this issue—by proposing that there should be an opportunity for cross-cutting questions on youth policy, embracing the Home Office, the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills. As more work is done in Whitehall on a cross-departmental basis, it is right that the House should adapt its procedures so that we can also maintain cross-cutting scrutiny. I believe that our proposal for change in Westminster Hall will be helpful. We will work with the Chairman of Ways and Means to try to find an early opportunity in the new Session when we can put into effect that proposal for questions on youth policy in Westminster Hall.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Is it not unsatisfactory that neither the Chancellor of the Exchequer nor the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry have yet been to the House to explain or justify their decision to put more than £600 million of public funds at risk in the form of emergency loans and guarantees to the virtually bankrupt private nuclear energy company, British Energy? Will the Leader of the House ensure that we have such a statement as soon as possible?

Mr. Cook: As I understand it, we will have a full opportunity to explore these issues next week. Once again I say that, if we had regular September sittings, such questions would not arise, because I am sure that we would have had a statement at the time. The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises will be debated next week, but it surely could not be responsible of any Government to allow a major nuclear energy installation to face the possibility of insolvency, with all the consequences that would have for the safety and

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security of our constituents. In those circumstances, it surely was right for the Government to act to make sure that nuclear safety is maintained.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on compensation for the victims—the soldiers and now the families—of the atomic tests in the Pacific in 1950? I am sure that he is aware that the Prime Minister supported a private Member's Bill in 1990 demanding compensation for the victims of those tests. As we are now in government, I am sure that the Government will be eager to ensure that justice is done for those victims.

Mr. Cook: The Government are always eager to make sure that justice is done, and my hon. Friend may want to put those points to my colleagues from the Ministry of Defence who will be taking part in the subsequent debate.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will take points of order after the statement.

Housing Benefit

1.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the reform of housing benefit.

I am today publishing a prospectus, "Building Choice and Responsibility: a radical agenda for Housing Benefit", which sets out our proposals. The system that we have inherited is complicated, costly to administer, vulnerable to fraud and difficult for tenants to understand. For too many people, it means endless form filling and delays in payment. It is often a factor that prevents people from making the move from welfare into work.

Currently, we expect local authorities to reassess 4 million individual claims every year, whether they have changed or not. Nearly 2 million pensioners whose circumstances rarely change are expected to fill in a 40-page form every year just to renew their housing benefit. Local councils are compelled to deal with a bewildering array of overlapping rules for tenants in the private rented sector. That cannot be right. We need a system that puts real choice and responsibility in tenants' hands—one that supports work and cuts the risk of fraud. The Work and Pensions Committee and the Audit Commission have highlighted the need for change, as have many outside observers. It is time to get on with this reform.

It is clear that we need to break fundamentally with the past and bring in a fairer, simpler system, so we propose to introduce standard local housing allowances for private rentals, initially in 10 pathfinder areas. The allowance will be flat rate and based on area and family size. The amount paid will, as now, be income related. It will be paid directly to the tenant, except where vulnerable tenants are unable to manage their own affairs or where substantial arrears have built up. No one will be worse off when those pathfinder schemes start next year. In fact, tenants who find a suitable home with a rent less than the standard allowance will be able to keep the difference. That puts the decision and responsibility in their hands.

The reforms will build on the steps that we have already taken to improve administration and to begin the process of restructuring rents in the social rented sector. It is our intention to roll out reforms nationally and to develop ways of bringing in the social housing sector. That will be carefully informed by our assessment of the initial pathfinder areas, where we will work closely with local authorities, landlords, tenants associations and advice agencies.

Consultation will be led by the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), for whose work on these proposals I am very grateful. The reformed system will offer greater simplicity and certainty for tenants and landlords, extend tenant choice and responsibility, dramatically cut delays and support our wider aims of improving public services, tackling poverty and extending opportunity.

As they are simpler, standard local allowances will speed up the claims process, which will reduce the uncertainties that people face as their circumstances

change and will make trying a job a more attractive option. Furthermore, later this month, throughout the country we will start to introduce a rapid reclaim facility for when a job does not work out. We will also remove the need to make a new claim when someone gets a job. Housing benefit will simply run on until the in-work rate is calculated.

We are taking other steps to improve the service for everyone. Jobcentre Plus clients will be able to make claims over the telephone, and from next autumn pensioners will no longer have to fill out a new housing benefit form every year.

We are committed to working in partnership with councils to improve performance through clearer standards and increased accountability. We are already seeing progress. In March, we set out clear standards for housing benefit performance. We will build on that by providing £200 million for training and modernisation over the next three years to help councils that are committed to improvement. We shall also challenge poor performance and stand ready to intervene where local authorities fail to deliver an acceptable service.

It is also crucial that we crack down on fraud. This package of reforms will do just that. First, it will simplify the housing benefit system in order to free resources for the fight against fraud. Secondly, the perverse incentive for corrupt landlords to collude with tenants to set high rents will be removed. Thirdly, we are providing £60 million to support the tighter checking of claims, stopping fraud getting into the system in the first place.

The Government are committed to taking action against rogue landlords who abuse the system. As soon as parliamentary time allows, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister intends to legislate to tackle the minority of rogue landlords and boost our drive against poor conditions. It is also important that tenants understand their obligations to behave in a neighbourly way.

As we made clear following the introduction of the private Member's Bill promoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the Government are considering housing benefit sanctions as part of our wider strategy to tackle nuisance neighbours through stricter tenancy agreements and improved antisocial behaviour orders. By making tenants responsible for payment of their rent, the reforms that I am announcing today reinforce the link between rights and responsibilities.

In conclusion, reform of housing benefit is essential. The proposals combine simplicity and streamlined procedures with greater individual choice. They offer a better deal for tenants, landlords and local authorities. We must now work together to make them a success.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): Housing benefit does indeed need to be reformed. Successive Governments have promised to do it but none has really succeeded. The dilemma is whether to pay benefit for actual rent or make a standard payment of a rent allowance. Sixty years ago, Beveridge devoted an entire chapter of his great report to precisely that dilemma and revealingly entitled it "The problem of rent". He concluded that it would be better to make a standard payment, provided that rents in different areas had already moved close together. I think that he was right, and that is clearly the basis on which the Secretary of State is proceeding.

Let me ask the Secretary of State about the scale of his proposals. This Government have all too often proposed welfare reform, only to fail to deliver. About 4 million people are claiming housing benefit. How many claimants does he expect to receive housing benefit in the new way, after he has implemented the pathfinders? Is he committing himself now to proceeding straightforwardly to a complete national scheme after the pathfinders have been implemented, or is there to be a small number of pilots, after which the evidence will be scrutinised before a decision is made on what to do next? We need to know whether the gap between hype and reality that has so frequently dogged the Government's commitment to welfare reform is going to be in evidence yet again on housing benefit.

I should like also to ask the Secretary of State about the detail of the pathfinders. Will he assure the House that they will cover different parts of England? As he well knows, what might work in low-rent areas of the north may not necessarily work in parts of the south-east, where rents are much higher. Is there a danger of going back to the old days of two different housing benefit regimes—one for social housing tenants and another for private tenancies? His proposals currently appear to cover only private tenancies. Will he try to drive down rents in the private sector while those in the social housing sector continue to increase? How will he fix rents for existing tenants, especially if he says that none of them is to lose?

Perhaps most important of all, what about the serious problem of people trapped in dependency because of the incredibly high rates of combined withdrawal of housing benefit and income support that they now face? Will the right hon. Gentleman look at those very high tapers—sometimes over 90 per cent.—which trap thousands of people in benefits, or will the tapers be off-limits?

The Secretary of State went on to speak about the linking of housing benefit to behaviour. Hon. Members on both sides of the House must salute the imagination of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the author of that idea. We approached it in a constructive spirit when his private Member's Bill went into Committee—perhaps the Liberal Democrats did not, but my hon. Friends certainly did—and we will approach it in a constructive spirit again. But that was the proposal from the right hon. Member for Birkenhead. What has happened to the original proposal that was made by the Prime Minister, which linked child benefit to behaviour? Is that still on the agenda, or has it been dropped? Has the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions come to the House in order to drop an idea proposed by the Prime Minister, and instead to support an idea proposed by the former Minister for Welfare Reform, who was removed from his post? Has the Secretary of State decided that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead is right and the Prime Minister is wrong? We would like him to make that clear.

While we debate these ideas for the future, there is an immediate crisis in our housing benefit system in many parts of the country, especially in London, where it is close to collapse. Does the Secretary of State accept that there are people who are homeless on the streets, having been evicted from their houses by councils whose own failure to pay housing benefit is the source of the

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problem? We welcome practical proposals, including those made by him today, to tackle that problem, but the Secretary of State did not refer to one of the reasons why housing benefit administration is close to collapse. Ministers have produced more than 400 housing benefit circulars since the Government took office in 1997 and local authorities simply cannot keep up with them.

May I take this opportunity to urge the Secretary of State to consider our straightforward and practical proposal simply to change the regulations once or twice a year, so that local authorities do not face a stream of changes? We have also suggested that the Benefits Agency should, in the last resort, take over responsibility for housing benefit from local authorities that are clearly not up to the job. I hope that the Secretary of State will also consider those practical proposals to tackle an immediate crisis.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman implied that we were the first Government to try to get to grips with the problem since Beveridge. He might have given us some credit for grasping the nettle. I listened in vain throughout his remarks for a basic comment about whether the Conservative party thinks that our proposals are the right direction for reform or the wrong direction. I should have thought that the Opposition would welcome the move towards greater personal responsibility and choice for tenants; the tenants who will benefit from our reforms will certainly do so.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions. As I said in my statement, we propose initially to roll out the proposals in 10 pathfinder areas. We wish to extend the approach nationally, but clearly we must learn from the experience of the pathfinders in so doing.

As regards the number and the proportion of recipients of housing benefits who are affected, there are 4 million claims and about 20 per cent. of those—800,000—are in the private sector. We hope to roll the scheme out to between 5 and 10 per cent. of that case load through the pathfinders, so the hon. Gentleman can see that the number of people affected will be substantial. He asked whether those are pathfinders or pilots. We want to get on with rolling out the scheme.

In selecting the areas to be the pathfinders, yes, we want to ensure that not only the various regions of England, but areas in Scotland and Wales have the opportunity to try the new approach. The criteria that we will apply in selecting pathfinders is that they include a mix of high-cost, low-cost and medium-cost areas; we want to include substantial rural areas as well as urban areas; we want them to be in different parts of the country, and they need to be areas with a substantial case load of private rentals. We shall approach a number of authorities as soon as we can to see whether they are able to take part.

With regard to the Government's performance on housing benefit, I cannot help but refer to the utter shambles that we inherited and the Opposition's failure to take responsibility for the awful mess that they bequeathed us. We have invested in tougher action against fraud in the form of the benefit fraud inspectorate, we have sent help teams around the country and we have intervened in a number of local authorities—for example, we have substantially addressed the backlog in Hackney. Moreover, the ombudsman's recent report noted that complaints to him about housing benefit administration were down by a quarter.

I do not deny that a great deal more needs to be done to improve the efficiency of administration and to crack down on fraud, but our proposals will help us to achieve that end. We are putting resources and investment behind our commitment to efficiency and modernisation. Not only have we allocated £200 million from next year to modernise IT and to train staff, but £60 million has been explicitly dedicated to measures to combat fraud.

The key point is that these proposals will help. They make the system clearer and more straightforward and they remove the perverse incentive for corrupt landlords to collude with tenants in setting high rents. This is a big step forward towards tenants in the private sector who are dependent on housing benefit having some of the same rights and responsibilities that the rest of us take for granted.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I thank the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), for the work they have put in behind today's statement, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the courage and determination that he is now showing in reforming housing benefit. Had some of that been shown five years ago, he might have been announcing the completion of the reform rather than its commencement.

Does my right hon. Friend accept that when his statement is reviewed it will be seen as the abolition of the last vestiges of serfdom in our welfare system, and that instead of directing how claimants spend their money it will give them the freedom to spend it themselves?

Will my right hon. Friend give us some assurance about how the reform will be rolled out in the pilot areas? Will all claimants in the private sector be brought into the scheme, or will they become part of the scheme only if they wish to move or have to move?

Mr. Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome for the measures. With regard to the timing of their implementation, earlier steps were taken on modernisation and tackling fraud and rent restructuring measures are now under way for the social rented sector, but we are now getting on with these measures as quickly as we can.

With regard to how the reform will be rolled out in each of the pathfinder areas, our intention is that all private rentals where tenants receive housing benefit will be part of the pathfinder, except, as I said, where people are vulnerable and unable to manage their affairs or where there are substantial rent arrears. Another protection that the House will be interested in is that it makes sense for the initial payment to be made directly to the landlord, but thereafter it will be the responsibility of the tenant.

I am not sure whether I would describe the measures in exactly the same terms as my right hon. Friend did, as the abolition of serfdom—I would be proud to have played a leading role in such a cause—but they certainly

extend rights, responsibilities and opportunities to tenants in the private rented sector that they have been denied in the past and that the rest of us take for granted.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for grasping a nettle that his two immediate predecessors signally failed to grasp. It is all the more welcome that he has brought forward the proposals today. The aims that he set out are entirely laudable and many of the proposals, such as pensioners not having to reclaim within five years, are entirely sensible, and we shall welcome and support them. However, I have two fundamental concerns.

First, a political party recently said that it was proposing to complete the Thatcherite agenda. I had assumed that that was the Conservative party, but I hear that the right hon. Gentleman proposes to use housing benefit sanctions for antisocial tenants, which sounds good, macho and as though the Government are on the side of the decent against the antisocial, but in practice the consequence will be to move the problem around rather than to deal with it. Would not the money that these measures will cost be better spent on the many schemes around Britain that are working now to tackle the causes of antisocial behaviour? These measures will simply move the problem around when it has already occurred.

I have some serious concerns about rent restructuring. I get the impression that the Secretary of State lives in a world in which tenants are faced with a wide array of choice properties at decent prices, and that they pick and choose, then haggle to set a decent rent with the landlord. Well, it ain't like that, and I think that, deep down, the right hon. Gentleman knows that. Many tenants are price takers, and have little choice. They have to take what they are offered or they have to lump it. The Department's own research shows that shopping-around incentives have been a complete failure; they simply do not work. Tenants are not free choosers among a range of choice properties. Does the Secretary of State not agree that tenants will be forced to live in the cheap rent, ghetto part of town because they will not be able to afford to live in the decent part?

If the right hon. Gentleman's proposal is for the standard allowance to be set at the reference rent—effectively, the maximum rent—how will the pilot schemes tell us anything? Half the people will be paying less and have some free money—and will say thank you very much—while the other half will get what they are getting now. So what will the pilots actually teach us? With rents as they are, there is a real danger attached to the flat-rate payments. Rents still vary far too much, and people will be forced to move because their housing benefit does not cover their rent. That will mean children leaving their schools, and people moving away from members of their family who can provide child care. It will also disrupt employment. If the measures do not have the effect of causing people to choose different properties, what is the point of them? If they do, will they not "ghettoise" and distort people's lives?

Mr. Smith: It is clear that the Liberal Democrats are no part of the reformed agenda. That was an hysterically negative response to our radical proposals. I would caution the hon. Gentleman against lecturing me on the world I live in. My home in my constituency is on an estate where people are sick and tired of neighbours from hell making their lives a misery, day in and day out. This Government can take pride in linking rights with responsibilities, and if housing benefit has a part to play in the wider measures to tackle antisocial behaviour, so much the better.

On the hon. Gentleman's speculation about people being worse off, I said in my statement that no one will be worse off as a consequence of these proposals. Indeed, those whose rent is below the reference rent level will be better off. In resisting these proposals, the hon. Gentleman would condemn those people to the unfairness of having less money for their housing costs, just because they live in a cheap area. There is nothing liberal or democratic in his remarks if he would prefer to leave poor people ensnared in an incomprehensible state bureaucracy, rather than putting some power in their hands. I believe in empowering poor people, and that is what these proposals will do.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Secretary of State explain a little more about how his proposals will deal with private landlords who exploit the current system by not maintaining their properties, which, in effect, encourages antisocial behaviour and, as a result, accelerates neighbourhood decline?

Mr. Smith: I share my hon. Friend's commitment to tackling not only rogue landlords but the wider syndrome of degeneration, especially in some of our urban neighbourhoods. As I said, I believe that these proposals make a contribution to tackling those problems because they put more power in the hands of tenants and less in the hands of the bad landlords. They will make the situation clearer for tenants and landlords than it is at present. At the moment, when a tenant is deciding which property to live in, they are effectively shopping in the dark without knowing how much money they have in their purse. Under these proposals, they will know how much money they will be taking to get the best deal. It is right that we should extend to them the opportunity to express a choice in these situations. Of course, there is a much wider agenda here, and, as I said in my statement, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is consulting on wider measures to tackle antisocial landlords. We look forward to those measures being introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I welcome the broad thrust of the Secretary of State's proposals and I look forward to reading the detail of the consultation paper. I especially welcome his desire to crack down on both rogue landlords and neighbours from hell. He will understand the healthy scepticism on Conservative Benches about the claim that the Government will introduce fewer bureaucratic measures than their predecessors. If they can achieve that, we would warmly welcome it and wish them well.

In my experience, many software systems that local authorities use to oversee the housing benefit system often break down and fail to deliver. Will the Secretary of State give guidance and advice to local authorities on the computer systems that they should use to ensure that they deliver the right result and that tenants can interact with them quickly and carefully?

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for our proposals. He made an important

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point: IT software often leaves a great deal to be desired. A working group is examining the matter in partnership with local authorities. The roll-out of the pathfinders and their experience will provide important lessons about the way in which we can ensure that the system works properly and delivers the standards of service that we all expect.

The system is simpler because it makes poking around every nook and cranny of the assessment of every rent unnecessary. It should therefore be simpler for IT.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): My right hon. Friend referred to overcoming the complexity of claiming housing benefit under the current arrangements. Perhaps he could expand on the way in which the new measures would achieve that. Does not Jobcentre Plus operate as a method of assisting claimants by drawing people together who are seeking both benefits and employment? Will it assist matters to close jobcentres such as that in Eckington in my constituency? My right hon. Friend saved it in the past and may consider the position again. How will people in those circumstances find it easier to gain access to the provisions that we are considering?

Mr. Smith: As I said, the simpler system will be more user friendly and make it easier for people to claim their entitlements. The wider proposals to which I referred involve replacing approximately four forms that people must currently complete with one form. We will enable and encourage making claims by telephone. Jobcentre Plus will be able to handle those claims. As the scheme is rolled out across the country, it will become a genuine one-stop service for those who are seeking work as well as benefits.

My hon. Friend referred to a specific jobcentre. My ministerial team and I will be pleased to talk to him further about its future.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The development is welcome from the point of view of the Social Security Committee, as it was. The hurdle of housing benefit prevented people from getting off benefit and into work, and it was one of the biggest items of unfinished business since the Government were elected in 1997. This morning's announcement constitutes a significant step forward, which I welcome.

I hope that the Secretary of State will acknowledge that hon. Members would be wise to consider the detail carefully because it will make all the difference to whether the proposals are successful and fulfil the aspirations that he set out.

I want to make two brief points. First, I am slightly disappointed that the public sector has not been used for any of the pilots. I understand that the Labour party made a manifesto commitment to deal with private before public, but I hope that that does not mean that public is off the agenda for the rest of the Parliament. I would have been happier if the pathfinders had included some public sector research.

Secondly, when the Government introduced pension credit, they sensibly made it clear that the interface between housing benefit and pension credit would prejudice no one. Will the Secretary of State comment on the second phase of the tax credit reform that will be introduced next spring and how it will interface with the proposals that he announced this morning?

Mr. Smith: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome and for the work that his Select Committee does in this important area.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's first question, I too am keen to be able to include the social sector. Clearly we must have progress on rent restructuring. Given that that is predicated on an element of tenant choice, that too needs to be reflected in the social housing sector if the benefits are to be realised. As we roll out the pathfinders, we shall actively be looking for opportunities to involve the public sector. Far from that sector being off the agenda, it is very much on it in terms of the national roll-out of such reform.

The hon. Gentleman's second question was about tax credits coming in next April. We shall be examining carefully the interaction between the two factors that he identified, and we are mindful of the work that local authorities have to accomplish next year on housing benefit systems. It is especially important that there is careful consultation with the authorities that we are minded to approach as pathfinders to ensure that they are enthusiastic about taking on the job.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Beveridge decided not to proceed with fundamental housing benefit reform because of cost differentials in different parts of the country, which of course have increased dramatically over recent years. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the scheme works effectively in high-cost areas such as London? The number of properties in the private rented sector that are available to people on housing benefit has halved in five years. One of my constituents was told that to look for a property while on housing benefit, it would be necessary to go to Dartford, Billericay or Brentwood, 40 miles from central London. The choice agenda is critical.

Will my right hon. Friend ensure also that poverty is addressed? The shortfalls between the housing benefit that is payable and actual rents in the Greater London area are a major cause of poverty, and in turn drive households into homelessness and into public sector housing. In the application of the policy, will my right hon. Friend advise me how it will increase choice by increasing supply in the private rented sector, how it will reduce poverty and how it will reduce the flow of households, especially families from the private rented sector, into homelessness?

Mr. Smith: I am certainly mindful of the particular problems that affect high-cost areas; indeed, according to outside-London terms, my constituency is a high-cost area. I am sensitive to the particular challenge facing people and authorities in London. That is one of the reasons why we want to ensure that pathfinder areas include a London authority.

As for poverty, through these proposals no one will be worse off, and a significant proportion of tenants will be better off. There is a wider challenge facing us on housing supply, and that is one of the reasons why the

Government have already substantially increased investment in social housing. As a consequence of the spending review, we are accelerating that investment still further.

I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to keep these matters closely under review and to examine what are the future options to ensure that the problems that she has identified, arising from a diminishing range of properties available to those in housing need in London, are effectively addressed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I have time limited main business to protect this afternoon, in which many hon. Members wish to take part. I do not think that I will be able to call every Member who is trying to catch my eye on the statement. Brief questions and brief answers would help.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I was struck by the explanation that the Minister gave to the Liberal Democrats, which was that an individual cannot be an intelligent purchaser unless he or she knows how much they have to spend. When the right hon. Gentleman is selecting the pathfinders, will he make particular efforts to cover an area where rents are variable geographically or seasonally? Will he take account of the need to cover effectively those whose incomes vary substantially during the year, such as seasonal workers or those who do not receive all the money that they should through the Child Support Agency?

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for welcoming my comment. It is not the first time that we have made common cause against the Liberal Democrats.

We will address the variable geography and incomes to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Rent reference areas try to take account of that and we will work on the basis of existing areas. I agree that there are big issues to consider for the future and that we will have to learn from the pathfinders. I will try to address his concern when we select the pathfinders.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The problem with housing benefit in my constituency, which is an area of high and rising rents and a diminishing number of properties, is not the speed in processing claims—my borough of Camden has two charter marks for excellence in that—but the gap between the level of rent set by the local rent officer and the rent set by the private landlord. What formula will be used to define a standard rent allowance? Many of my constituents who suffer most grievously are single people. How will they be helped?

Mr. Smith: I echo my hon. Friend's comments about the performance of her local authority. As well as castigating those that do poorly, it is important to praise those that make a difficult system work effectively.

The reference rent will be set on the basis of the present system, disregarding outliers and taking an intermediate level between the highest and lowest rents in the area. By putting the money in the hands of the tenants and, as I said, by removing the perverse incentive for corrupt landlords to collude with tenants in raising rents, it is likely that the reform will exercise some downward pressure on rents. That will help, although I do not want to overemphasise the effect.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): The statement says that the allowance will be flat rate, based on area and family size. However, we need to address the particular housing costs experienced by people with disabilities, given that those are unrelated to area and family size. That was the subject of an Adjournment debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), which was given a sympathetic hearing by the Minister.

Mr. Smith: It is very important that the needs of disabled people are properly addressed. The reform will not alter the premiums and the support that they get from the disability living allowance. I shall keep an eye on the operation of pathfinders to ensure that disabled people's needs are properly reflected. There is no need whatever why disabled people should be denied the same choice and opportunity that is available to others. Indeed, they should enjoy it to the full.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Can the Secretary of State assure my constituents, who live in a high-housing cost, high-demand area, that they will continue to get a reasonable supply of private rented accommodation under the system? Many of us are concerned about that. In addition, will he intervene on local authorities that have proved themselves completely incompetent to deliver housing benefit? Islington council, which is run by the Liberal Democrats, has bizarrely signed a continuation contract with a company called ITNET, which over the past five years has proven itself incapable of delivering housing benefit safely and securely to anyone in my borough, so causing immense hardship.

Mr. Smith: Many landlords are also put off by the complexities and delays in the present system. The reform should help those who want to make their properties available.

We stand ready, however, to intervene. The directions that we have issued have had an effect and are in addition to the measures that we are taking on the help teams and in addition to the extra investment. In the final analysis, if the people who run an authority are incompetent, we can take it off them and get someone else to run it.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Will the Secretary of State assure the House that his Department will examine the practice of some local housing authorities that stop the payment of housing benefit while they investigate tenants? That presumes guilt before the investigation is concluded and greatly worries many tenants.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support for the Bill promoted by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and remind the House that every Conservative and Labour Member supported its proposals in Committee.

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and for welcoming the reforms. I shall certainly

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look into the instances that he describes. We take the advice of the benefit fraud inspectorate on these matters and I shall make it my business to get a report from the inspectorate on the issue.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement in so far as it reforms bureaucracy, but I should like to ask him about the underlying principle. Over the past 20 years, less and less subsidy has gone into building low-cost housing and more and more has gone into the housing benefit system, resulting in bureaucracy and the poverty trap. A large amount of it has gone to unscrupulous landlords. Is it not about time that we put money back into low-cost house building as that would do a great deal to reduce the chronic hardship being suffered by so many people in this country who cannot get decent accommodation?

Mr. Smith: It is not an either/or as I am sure my hon. Friend would agree. We need to increase supply and establish a fair and efficient system for supporting those who cannot afford their rent. The proposals are dedicated specifically to my hon. Friend's second point, and as I said, I think that they will encourage more landlords.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has announced substantial increases in social housing investment to address the first point that my hon. Friend raised.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Will the proposals reflect differentials in seaside resorts where tenancies are often for six months and where accommodation is at a premium during the summer months, but plentiful during the winter months? How will choice be increased? Will the proposals do anything to help landlords to find tenants who abscond owing rent that they are never able to recover and housing benefit, which those landlords then have to repay to local authorities?

Mr. Smith: On the second point, when arrears build up—eight weeks of arrears is normally the yardstick—we would reinstate direct payments, so there is that measure of safeguard for landlords. Variability of rents in seaside or other areas should be reflected in the way in which the reference rent is calculated. At the moment the proposals do not alter that, but in pathfinder areas those whose present rent is below the reference rent level and in that sense are penalised for living in a cheaper area will get the allowance up to the full reference level and will be better off as a consequence.

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): May I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) and ask my right hon. Friend to say something about how he sees the new measures helping in particular young people under 25 in a high-housing cost area such as mine in Brighton and Hove? Under the current system, many young people are being priced out of the town in which they were born and brought up.

Mr. Smith: It is important that we address the wider questions of housing supply. The Government have already amended the single room assessment basis for housing benefit, which has made some measure of improvement to the situation and we will continue to keep these matters under review.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): If we are to move to a system of flat rates, based in some way on current local reference rents, how will we overcome the problem that has already been referred to in high-cost areas such as London of the big and growing gaps which exist between the reference rents and the real level of rents that people are being charged? On the question of choice, as that is what the statement is about, how many landlords, once they know exactly what the standard rate is, are likely to charge less than that figure? Will it not mean that low rents will go up unless we deal with landlords who let properties in poor condition, by refusing to let them into the system?

Mr. Smith: It is very important that decent housing standards are enforced more generally through the legislative protection of those standards and the work of environmental health departments. The reference rents system works by taking a middle point between high and low rents in an area and that should address the relevant problems over time, but as I said in an earlier reply, I acknowledge that there is a particular problem in high-cost areas and we will pay close attention to it in future.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I apologise to the Secretary of State for missing the first 60 seconds of his statement. I also apologise in advance lest by saying that I broadly welcome the proposals I undermine support for them.

The proposals seem to be the logical and foreseen development of the rent reference system that I introduced. Action could not be taken immediately because the possible divergence of rents meant that the cost might be high. What cost does the Secretary of State envisage in extra benefit? Will he also assure us that local authorities will retain the discretion to pay above the standard allowance if that is necessary, for instance to enable an elderly mother to live near her family in what may be high-rent accommodation, but thereby avoiding the need to enter residential accommodation?

Mr. Smith: Obviously the cost will depend partly on the impact of the reforms on rent levels over time, but the extra amount that we anticipate for the pathfinders is around £20 million.

I can confirm that we do not intend to limit the discretion of local authorities that currently have that discretion, although we expect the basis of payment to come from the tenant except when there is good reason for that not to happen.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Is there any scope for giving benefit to some who currently do not receive it, particularly in high-cost areas such as the one I represent? In my area an ex-council house can cost £850 a month, and a two-bedroomed flat in Apsley can cost £1,000 a month. As a result, the disposable incomes of some people such as starter teachers are extremely low. Giving such people housing benefit would increase incentives to work.

Mr. Smith: It is no part of these proposals to extend eligibility for housing benefit. As I said in my statement,

benefit will be income-related as it is now. We will of course keep such matters as tapers under review, but the short answer to my hon. Friend's question is no, we do not anticipate including more people as a consequence of the report.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on tackling a complex but crucial area. Does he agree that tackling bad landlords requires work to license them, which I know is being done in another Department? Does he also agree that ensuring that direct payments are made to tenants is crucial to enforcing the rights and responsibilities agenda and empowering tenants? Should that not apply to social housing as well as private tenants?

Mr. Smith: I agree on both counts. As I said, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is to present proposals for tackling bad landlords. I am acutely aware of the awful situation facing many low-demand areas, and of the possible scope for effective licensing.

As for the philosophy underpinning the reform, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is very important for us to put power in the hands of poorer people. That is what the reform will do: such people will have more choice and, as my hon. Friend says, will be able to take more responsibility. As I have said, for the same reasons we should extend that approach to the social housing sector as soon as we can, and I am sure that the benefits will be just as great.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Order. We must now move on.

Points of Order

2.4 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier today, during an exchange on the so-called modernisation proposals, the Leader of the House made a slight error in describing the policy of the official Opposition on sitting hours. May I take this opportunity to put the record straight? We propose that the House sit at 9.30 am on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, suspending sittings for lunch at 1 pm or earlier and commencing the main business at 2 pm. The House would then continue to sit until 7 pm. The distinction is rather important, and I did not want to leave the inadvertent mischaracterisation by the Leader of the House uncorrected.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am sure that the House is obliged to the right hon. Gentleman. I understand that these matters will be further discussed on 29 October.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you help us with the delays that we are still experiencing in the receipt of written parliamentary answers to questions? Yesterday I received an answer from the Ministry of Defence to a question that I originally asked to have answered on 25 February. I received a holding reply on 25 February and a substantive reply last night. I am being generous to the Ministry in describing it as a substantive reply because it did not really answer the question. Is it not unacceptable that it should take almost eight months for any Ministry, however hard-pressed, to respond to a question from an hon. Member?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On many previous occasions Mr. Speaker has said that he expects hon. Members to get prompt attention from Ministers. I am sure that by allowing that point of order to be expressed it gives further emphasis to the matter. Obviously, it is important that Members should be able to get their queries dealt with as quickly and efficiently as possible. If the hon. Member continues to experience extraordinary delays, he may wish to take up the matter with the Public Administration Committee.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could those responsible perhaps make some effort to ensure that information which is said to be placed in the Library of the House is in fact in the Library of the House? I have received many telephone calls since the answering of a question on 19 September from the press asking for information which subsequent inquiry has discovered has not yet been sent to the Library.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, it is an irritant to hon. Members if that occurs. I can only hope that by expressing this view from the Chair, Departments will take special care to ensure that what their Ministers say is being done is backed up by the action.

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Orders Nos. 114 and 116,

That—

(1) the proposal for a draft Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, being a legislative proposal relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Thursday 24th October at 2.30 p.m.; and

(3) at that meeting the Committee shall consider the legislative proposal referred to it under paragraph (1) above, and the Chairman shall interrupt proceedings at 4.30 p.m.—*[Mr Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

Defence in the World

[Relevant document: The Fifth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2001–02, HC914, on the Future of NATO.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

2.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): This is the fourth of five themed defence debates planned to take place in the House in the current parliamentary Session. The title today is "Defence in the World". The House will have an opportunity at the end of the month to debate "Defence in the United Kingdom".

Any debate about defence today must begin with the appalling events of 11 September last year, echoed again by yet more innocent deaths, this time in Bali. The unprovoked and devastating attacks in New York and Washington, and the fourth, failed hijack, have dominated policy and thinking across the world and across this Government. They were clearly the most significant drivers in the work of the Ministry of Defence in the last year.

We are still dealing with the consequences of those events. They have included the deployment of British combat forces to Afghanistan and a review of our security and defence plans. I should like to take this opportunity to reaffirm to the House our appreciation of the way both our armed forces and the civil servants within the Ministry of Defence responded to those considerable challenges.

We were faced with two immediate tasks in the wake of those attacks: first, we needed urgently to respond to the direct threat facing the United Kingdom and its interests; and, secondly, we needed to re-examine our policies and planning to deal with al-Qaeda and other international terrorist organisations.

The Government's defence policy was set out in the strategic defence review of 1998. It was rightly acclaimed at the time, and the past four years have demonstrated its resilience to events. The 11 September attacks, however, required us to undertake an urgent re-examination of our stance. They showed us that what might previously have been seen as potentially dangerous but distant developments now posed a direct and immediate threat. It also involved finding new ways of dealing with those threats.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out the Government's wider counter-terrorist strategy in the House on 16 October last year. It embraced both immediate campaign aims and longer-term objectives. In the immediate aftermath of 11 September, we sought to prevent al-Qaeda from posing a continuing terrorist threat, and to deny it a base in Afghanistan. We also made it clear that we were determined, as part of our wider strategic goals, to bring the leaders of that evil organisation to account. More widely, we sought to do everything possible to work for the elimination of international terrorism as a force for change in the world.

Last month, we published a progress report on the campaign against international terrorism, setting out the United Kingdom's contribution to the campaign.

But we all know that international terrorism demands an international response. No one nation can defeat the many, disparate and well-hidden threats, of which al-Qaeda is only the principal. Moreover, no one nation is threatened in isolation. As last weekend's awful bombing in Bali demonstrated, we are in this together and we need to act together.

It is in that context that we are dealing with Saddam Hussein. At the end of last month, this House had the opportunity to debate the Government's response to the threat of Iraq and from its weapons of mass destruction. That Saddam Hussein is a brutal and cruel dictator is not in doubt. What has been at issue is the nature of the threat that he poses to us and to the middle east region, and what we need to do about it.

Saddam Hussein has spent years trying to build up his stores of weapons of mass destruction; he certainly strives to add nuclear capabilities to that arsenal. If we cannot ensure his disarmament, he will eventually succeed. If we were to underestimate the threat and fall for more of his duplicitous trickery, or simply do nothing, we would be guilty of a profound abdication of responsibility. Saddam Hussein must disarm.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Will the Secretary of State explain to the House in what circumstances he would consider the use of nuclear weapons?

Mr. Hoon: I have set out to the House on a considerable number of occasions that it has not been the policy of this or any Government to set out the precise circumstances in which a nuclear weapon would be used, not least because the purpose of retaining nuclear weapons is to deter. To set out precisely the circumstances in which we would use such a weapon would eliminate the effect of the deterrence. I am sure that my hon. Friend was aware of the answer that I was likely to give to him, as he has asked me that question before. However, for the avoidance of doubt, I am grateful for the opportunity of repeating it.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): On a slightly different matter, my right hon. Friend underlines that action should take place, if possible, in an international context—if, indeed, action is to take place in Iraq. Will he allow the House to be privy to the legal advice that the Attorney-General has given to the Government, some of which appeared in *The Guardian* last week? It would be helpful for colleagues in the House to understand the legal context and the legitimacy of any action that may or may not take place.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is a very experienced Member of the House and I am surprised that, after so long here, he still believes what he reads in *The Guardian*. I can assure him that there was not advice from Her Majesty's Law Officers. Moreover, he well knows that it is a long-standing convention that Ministers do not disclose the legal advice, or other advice, that they receive.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Perhaps my right hon. Friend might clarify for me the Government's view at this moment, in this context, of an international community. He referred to the need for the international community to act together to tackle international terrorism. On the issue of a strike against Saddam Hussein, it would seem that the international community has reduced to two sovereign states, namely the United Kingdom and the United States. Is he saying that this now constitutes the international community and that we will engage against Iraq if the rest of what I understood to be the international community stays where it is, firmly saying no to a pre-emptive strike?

Mr. Hoon: I am sorry that my hon. Friend takes that view of the international community. Even a superficial reading of today's newspapers—*[Interruption.]* I did say "superficial." A superficial reading of the newspapers would demonstrate that the international community is engaged in a discussion in the United Nations and, probably as I am speaking, efforts are being made to produce a new Security Council resolution. That is involving the Security Council and other members in trying to establish the clear view of the international community. With the greatest respect, I disagree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I do not often make common cause with the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), but on this question I do. The Opposition have previously called for a proper explanation of the legal basis on which pre-emptive action against Iraq might be taken. It is not usual for the Government to publish their legal advice, but there are precedents, and I submit that in these circumstances the precedent is a valid one. The new Bush doctrine on pre-emptive strikes is an important development in security law. The question of pre-emption is touched upon in the Government's defence policy document on the new chapter to the strategic defence review, and it is incumbent on them to establish that what they are proposing or contemplating has a clear basis in international law.

Mr. Hoon: I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman suggest that this is a new development. If he checks carefully the use of the word "pre-emption", he will find it first referred to in the 19th century. I realise that that may be new for some Conservatives. However, the hon. Gentleman will find that there is a well-established 19th century doctrine of pre-emption based on the concept of self-defence, which allows a sovereign state to take action to protect itself in the event of an imminent threat. The document that he refers to, published by the United States Administration, is based firmly on that tradition.

Mr. Jenkin: I am delighted to hear the Government agreeing with the Bush national security strategy. However, the question is not whether pre-emption is a new concept but whether we are adjusting what we regard as an imminent threat in the new security climate. It is very difficult to establish what is an imminent threat. We want to be sure that what we judge to be an imminent threat is securely founded in international law.

Mr. Hoon: If the hon. Gentleman reads carefully what he has just said, he will realise that he is arguing in a circular manner. He is now asking me to apply the principles of international law to a situation that has not

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yet arisen. In those circumstances, he will understand perfectly well why it would not be sensible for me to answer his question.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): The Secretary of State referred to the debate that we had on the recall of Parliament, but of course there was no vote on that occasion—*[Interruption.]* Well, there was no substantive vote on the deployment of British troops. The Leader of the House has suggested that there should be a substantive vote on the deployment of British troops. Indeed, the President of the United States has sought and received support from both Houses of Congress. Does the Secretary of State believe that there should be a vote before British troops are deployed into action?

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House have both set out the Government's position in this matter. It will obviously be resolved when and if that time comes, but as the time has not yet come, it is not necessary for me to answer that question at this stage.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): The Secretary of State seems to be suggesting that moving from the historic basis of our defence in the past 40 years—namely the principle of deterrence—to a principle of pre-emption is a minor step that does not need full explanation. Surely to goodness we need to have that debate, whether we agree on the principle or not; it is no good trying to tiptoe past it.

Mr. Hoon: On the contrary, I was not suggesting that there had been a change. I was suggesting that for the past 40 years we had lived perfectly comfortably with the concept of pre-emption and deterrence. If I did not communicate that clearly to the hon. Gentleman, I sincerely apologise, but that is the position.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the main cause of the acts of terrorism that we have witnessed is a belief—almost certainly a mistaken belief—among Muslim communities throughout the world that they have been badly treated by the western Christian communities? Is not the worst way to deepen that suspicion and encourage more acts of terrorism to invade Iraq before there is a just settlement in Palestine?

Mr. Hoon: I simply do not accept what my hon. Friend says. If he thinks very carefully about al-Qaeda and the appalling attacks that it has perpetrated over very many years, many of which have seen Muslims as its victims, he will realise that he is talking nonsense, if he will forgive me for saying so.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): How confident is my right hon. Friend that he will get the support of the United Nations? My colleagues and I receive many letters from constituents expressing their concern that we go through the United Nations.

Mr. Hoon: That is the Government's position and we are trying to achieve our policy on that. As I said when answering an earlier question, we are using all our efforts to secure that international consensus behind our position.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: If hon. Members will forgive me, I wish to make a little progress. I shall give way again in a moment.

We want to achieve that end through the United Nations, without recourse to military action, but we must show Saddam Hussein that we have the resolve to act. Recent history demonstrates that he will not give up his ambitions out of the goodness of his heart. We have to show that we are prepared to back our words with action, however reluctantly. It is for Saddam Hussein to avoid conflict by agreeing to abide by United Nations resolutions, granting genuinely unfettered access to weapons inspectors and obeying international law. The Government have the resolve and the will to act if he is so mistaken as to put the world's determination to the test.

The issue remains a difficult one for all of us. No one takes these decisions lightly or without careful consideration of all the options. That is why it is so crucial that we have a clear policy underlying those options.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): President Bush has made it abundantly clear that if the United Nations does not act to punish Iraq, the United States will act alone, with or without UN backing. Does the Secretary of State agree with him? Secondly, does my right hon. Friend agree with me that unilateral action against Iraq will fracture the international coalition? Now is the right time to stop using the words "international community", because only three heads of state support this war: Ariel Sharon and President Bush supported by our Prime Minister.

Mr. Hoon: Let me make it clear that there is no war and that the Government's policy has been consistently set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It is that we will go through the United Nations and work within it to achieve that international consensus. Today, I have emphasised that that effort will be far more successful, and that efforts we make through the United Nations are more likely to be successful, if Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime are aware that we are prepared to back that determination by the use of force if it becomes necessary.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I draw the attention of the Secretary of State to a United States Congressional Budget Office document, which clearly states:

"President Bush has been guaranteed that Britain will send troops to fight a US-led war."

It continues:

"The report, finalised on September 30th, says Britain is the only country that has said it will commit troops".

The document also gives a figure of £5 billion for our costs. When the Secretary of State was recently in Washington, did he discuss that report with the Congressional Budget Office? Has he seen it, has he got a copy of it and can he share it with the rest of us?

Mr. Hoon: I did not see that report and I have not read it, but I know that my hon. Friend understands the way

in which the constitution of the United States operates. It is important that I emphasise to the House that the report is based on the planning assumptions of the Congressional Budget Office; it is not a document of the United States Administration. I must make it clear that any reference to, or suggestion of, any specific offer of forces by the United Kingdom is simply wrong. That office is an organ of Congress; it is not part of the United States Government. Therefore, my hon. Friend and the House should not take what it states as truth because it is based on an assumption that that office has made.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): If the international community says clearly that under no circumstances will there be military intervention in Iraq, why should the Iraqi dictator agree to the weapons inspectors coming back? Is it not clear that after four years—that is when they were thrown out—the only reason that he has agreed in principle now to the return of those weapons inspectors is the threat of possible military action? If there is war, the responsibility will lie with him.

Mr. Hoon: I tend to agree with my hon. Friend, who puts the point more forcefully and effectively than I did.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Opponents of the war have alleged that we may face a war on two fronts—one against al-Qaeda and one against Iraq. Will the Secretary of State share with the House his view of the extent to which the resources that one uses in a war against terrorists and those that one uses in a conventional war against a military power like Saddam overlap?

Mr. Hoon: I am about to deal with the development of our policy in the wake of the events of 11 September. It is clear that the basic assumptions in the strategic defence review were right—the need to be able to get forces quickly into a crisis, whether it is provoked by a conventional armed force or by terrorism. Clearly, we have refined those assumptions in the light of what took place on 11 September—the hon. Gentleman and I have debated this matter before—and I intend to deal with that in a moment.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is it not important to look behind the supposed agreement of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) with the Secretary of State? The history is that the weapons inspectors were not thrown out; they withdrew. The basic trouble was that they were abusing their position as inspectors. They were reporting back to Washington. Some, although not all of them, were spies. In Operation Desert Fox, areas were targeted that the inspectors had recently visited. That is the cause of much of the bad blood and trouble.

Mr. Hoon: Whatever the precise circumstance of their withdrawal from Iraq—I do not think that we need detain the House long on that—the reality is that the inspectors were prevented from doing the job mandated for them by the United Nations. That is why it is so important that we secure a new resolution that will allow the weapons inspectors unfettered access to any site and any place in Iraq. Otherwise, we risk repeating the mistakes that led to their withdrawal in 1998.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Will the Secretary of State explicitly clarify to Congress that the Congressional Budget Office document is a fiction and that there has been no agreement on the scale of troop involvement? Also, as this relates to the cost of any war against Iraq, will he publish the figures for the scale of the costs of certain levels of engagement? For example, what would be the cost of 10,000 or 20,000 troops per week over a period of engagement? Furthermore, what would be the cost of the occupation of Iraq afterwards?

Mr. Hoon: Although I have not seen that document, as I made clear a moment ago—I am not suggesting that the document is fiction—I can assure my hon. Friend and the House that no specific decisions have been taken on any commitment of British forces and that the document is based on an assumption that has been made by the Congressional Budget Office as to the likely scale of effort and its cost. I see no advantage for the House or anyone else in publishing the sort of statistical information that my hon. Friend requests.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): How important is it to have a simple resolution of the United Nations, not only to gain its acceptance, but to ensure that its terms can be delivered by Iraq credibly? If the resolution refers to persecution, accounting for the 600 people missing, oil smuggling and so forth, and includes clauses that could trigger a war, other members of the United Nations will not accept it and we will not get to the core of the issue, which is to get unfettered access for the inspectors and the decommissioning of weapons.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is right. As someone who spent much time in a previous ministerial position in the Foreign Office negotiating resolution 1284 at exhausting length and in exhausting detail, I recognise that a simple statement of the international community's position is necessary today, as well as an indication of the consequences in the event of that position not being satisfied.

Across Government, we have been set new challenges by international terrorism. We have set in train work to re-examine our defence policy and plans in the light of the terrorist threat demonstrated on 11 September. We consulted widely and openly. We published two discussion documents and ideas from individuals and organisations, including many valuable contributions from hon. Members and the other place. As a result, we published a new chapter to the strategic defence review on 18 July. It shows that the strategic defence review's emphasis on expeditionaryoperations working with allies was right, but demonstrates—crucially—how best to use our forces against a different sort of enemy: one that is determined, well hidden and vastly different from the conventional forces that we might have expected to face in the past.

One key area that we identified as needing urgent investment was what we call network-centric capability. I honestly wish that we did not call it that, but we did. Essentially, it involves linking our intelligence, analytical and offensive forces together, so that we can strike quickly when fleeting opportunities arise. This means that we will invest more in airborne sensors such as unmanned aerial vehicles, and more in the networks that assemble and process the data from the sensors. The precision systems that will hit the targets identified could include Tomahawk or Storm Shadow missiles, or

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special forces, or the Apache attack helicopter, depending on what is the most militarily effective. This is already costing the country money. We have therefore addressed not only the adjustments that were needed to policy and capabilities, but the resources needed to implement them.

The results of the spending review announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in July represented the largest sustained increase in defence spending for 20 years. By 2005–06, the defence budget will be some £3.5 billion higher than it is this year. That constitutes real growth of 3.7 per cent. over three years—3 per cent. in the year 2003–04 alone. That spending is to be focused on accelerating the modernisation and evolution of the armed forces in response to the changing strategic environment.

I have already heard grumbling from the Opposition about defence spending, but it is worth noting that the Opposition spokesman cannot undertake to match our spending pound for pound. When the rhetoric is stripped away, the facts are simple: one cannot defend the United Kingdom with waffle, as he has sought to do. It is only this Government who are prepared to put their money where their mouth is on defence. That money is not for investing in the status quo. It will be used not only to procure cutting-edge technology for the armed forces, but to modernise the way we work as a Department, improve efficiency, and enhance living conditions for our armed forces. We may have more to spend, but we need to spend it better.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Will the Secretary of State advise the House as to the current strength of the British Army, and whether its being under strength is affecting its capacity to undertake all its duties?

Mr. Hoon: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are still slightly short of the target set, but in recent months a record number of recruits have entered basic training. Although we still have some ambitious targets to satisfy, I am confident that we are taking the right decisions to enable us to move toward the manning totals for the Army and the other two services.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The right hon. Gentleman will know that, under the headline goals established to make the European security and defence identity effective, significant force improvements are required by all the participating countries. The United Kingdom is not doing too badly, and the French are doing exceptionally well through their five-year defence review. Will he therefore recommend to other European allies that they follow the French example, and if necessary bust the criteria of the stability pact to achieve the headline goals?

Mr. Hoon: I think that I heard the hon. Gentleman say something nice about France—there is hope for us all. I shall deal briefly with European defence matters in a moment, but he is right: it is vital not only that countries spend more on defence, but that they spend the money better. I do not know whether his question betrays support for the headline goal process, but I shall not push him too far, given his previous admission. We have strongly supported that process in part because it is concentrated on capabilities—on a process of persuading our partners in the European Union to spend more on defence, and to spend it better.

It is important that our service men and women are equipped with reliable and effective weapons that are up to the demands that we place on them. Obviously, they should have full confidence in the equipment that they use. The House will be aware of the decision to retain in service the SA80 A2 weapons system. Modifications to the system have improved its reliability and made it among the best in the world. Those findings have been confirmed in a series of stringent trials. I want to reassure the House that Defence Ministers and senior members of the military have looked at the issue closely. I am fully satisfied that we have taken the right decision, that the SA80 A2 is up to the job, and that, as our service personnel see its capabilities properly demonstrated, their confidence in this vital equipment will be retained.

Of course, it is not just at our own national level that we need to organise our defence capabilities to meet the threats and demands of the new strategic environment. NATO is on track with its transformation programme, which will be the key element of next month's Prague summit. The alliance's command structure will be reshaped, and new capabilities and the proposed NATO response force will provide the cutting edge. As I said, we continue to work with our European partners to strengthen European capabilities under the European Union's headline goal, which we aim to have delivered by the end of next year.

Mr. Dalyell: As a former, albeit extremely junior, member of 7th Armoured Brigade, may I ask about the Challenger tank? Those of us who were tank crew in previous eras are understandably concerned at what we read about the problems with the Challenger 2, and the filters that might be required in the desert.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend refers to one of the lessons learned from a major desert exercise in Oman. It clearly demonstrated that, whatever the prevailing sand conditions, the Challenger 2 needs appropriate modification if it is to be deployed in such circumstances. I can assure the House that, in the event of so deploying a Challenger 2, it will be appropriately modified.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Is my right hon. Friend aware of evidence taken by the Defence Committee yesterday from Simon Webb, director of policy at the Ministry of Defence? We got the impression that Challenger 2s were sent out not to learn lessons about filters and how deployable they are in deserts, but to test whether they could get out there.

Mr. Hoon: There is no doubt that they got out there, but I am not sure that it is wholly sensible to draw the distinction that my hon. Friend draws. I doubt whether the House would regard it as particularly satisfactory for me to set out only those lessons learned that we intended to learn; the truth is that we have to learn a range of lessons from that experience, and I can assure the House that we have done so.

Our work over the past 12 months has been focused on one simple proposition: the need to defend the people of the United Kingdom, their interests and their allies.

We face many threats in an increasingly unpredictable world, but above all else we have to deal with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The recent admission by North Korea that it has a nuclear weapons programme illustrates how critical that is. The terrible nature and power of these weapons in unscrupulous hands is such that there can be few more important challenges than protecting ourselves and our friends and allies from their potentially devastating impact.

Let us make no mistake: there are people who are more than willing to use such weapons against us. I have spoken of Iraq, but the possibility of any one of a range of terrorist groups acquiring a chemical, biological, radiological or even nuclear weapon is far from fantasy. They are trying to acquire such weapons, and we cannot be certain that they will not succeed. In terms of the death and destruction that they can cause and the strategic effect that they can achieve, many of these weapons are neither costly nor even complex to manufacture.

Linked to the threat from weapons of mass destruction is that of ballistic missile proliferation. Such missiles pose a threat in themselves, but it is their capability to deliver WMD warheads that make them still more of a concern. Right hon. and hon. Members may therefore find it helpful if I say a few words about the work in the United States on the development of ballistic missile defence systems, and this Government's position on such systems.

The United States' withdrawal from the anti-ballistic missile treaty took effect on 13 June. Contrary to some commentators' expectations, that did not prove to be the prelude to a new strategic arms race. In fact, it coincided with the negotiation and conclusion of the Moscow treaty, under which the United States and Russia agreed to steep reductions in the numbers of their deployed strategic nuclear warheads. The US missile defence programme is gathering momentum, as Monday evening's successful test illustrates. In particular, the United States has plans for a test-bed in the Pacific, to be used to develop and evaluate options for a basic missile defence system capable of addressing the full range of missile threats. Developing effective ballistic missile defence is a hugely challenging task. Any system will inevitably have to develop on an evolutionary basis, as understanding increases of the technological and other risks and opportunities involved.

During the summer, US officials visited London and other European capitals, as well as NATO headquarters in Brussels, to set out possible approaches to missile defence and to repeat US willingness to offer protection to friends and allies. It is right that we recognise the potential contribution of missile defence to a comprehensive strategy to deal with the threat from ballistic missiles—a strategy that also includes non-proliferation and counter-proliferation measures, diplomacy and deterrence.

The close access to the US research programme that we already enjoy will be essential background to inform any decisions that we may wish to take on missile defence for Europe or the United Kingdom. Against that background, I want to make two points that I and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary have made many times before. The United States Administration have made no specific decisions about the precise future architecture of a United States missile defence system. No formal request has been made to us for the use of RAF Fylingdales as part of the US programme.

If a US request for the use of Fylingdales—or any other UK facility for missile defence purposes—is received, we will consider it very seriously. The Government would agree to such a request only if we were satisfied that the overall security of the UK and the alliance would be enhanced. Since this subject is highly complex and one of considerable interest to the House, I have asked for some detailed analytical work to be completed on the implications of missile defence and its relationship with other elements of a comprehensive strategy against the ballistic missile threat. We welcome parliamentary and public discussion of the issues involved. I therefore intend to make available in the coming months further analytical and discussion material as our work progresses, and we will be ready to discuss these issues in the House at the appropriate time.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Has the Secretary of State not just made a coded statement that Britain will take part in missile defence and will support the United States in this costly disaster—the proposed star wars in the sky—which will cost this country dear, and line us up ever more closely with the United States and all its interests, against the rest of the world?

Mr. Hoon: I do not recall saying that. I am sure, however, that if my hon. Friend has the opportunity to read carefully what I said, he will see that there was no code but a clear statement of the Government's current position.

Mr. Prisk: As the Secretary of State will recall, I have asked him about this issue repeatedly over the last year, and I am pleased that we are finally achieving a little parity. May I tease out a little more from him on what he described as the close access that the Government have enjoyed? Over the last year, in answering questions from me and others, he has said that there has been no direct involvement. Is he now saying that there have been links? Can he confirm that a Royal Air Force officer who is already operating and working at NATO is participating in the programme there? I welcome the progress, but I hope that he can be clear on the matter.

Mr. Hoon: I assure the hon. Gentleman that at no stage have I misled the House on these matters. In answer to parliamentary questions, we have made it clear that a research programme has been continuing in the Ministry of Defence for some time on the technical matters to which I have just referred. The material to which I have referred and the co-operation that is enjoyed by the United Kingdom with the United States is about basic research principles. That has been disclosed to the House on many previous occasions.

Mr. Keetch: I am glad that the Government will, effectively, produce a dossier on Britain's potential involvement in national missile defence, and that there might be a debate. Can the Secretary of State tell us

[Mr. Keetch]

when it might be? Will he assure the House that, if there is to be a dossier and a debate, we will have more time to look at it than we did in relation to the dossier on Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: The fair answer to that is that it will take place when we are ready.

Jim Knight: I have yet to make up my mind on missile defence. Does the Secretary of State agree that, when we have the debate, it is important to move away from the nonsense about star wars—with every respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn)—and recognise that there are three phases to a missile? Only one of those phases would involve interception in space, and I understand that that is the most difficult and the most unlikely to be developed. If we want a sensible debate so that people can make up their minds, let us do that, and not get wrapped up in strange media myths such as star wars.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his common-sense approach. Perhaps he might assist in advising some of my other colleagues on the circumstances in question.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the Secretary of State at least agree that those of his Back-Bench colleagues who are so opposed to taking action against Saddam Hussein, and who feel that Saddam should be left at liberty to go on developing ballistic missiles, should at least experience a belated conversion to ballistic missile defence? That might make their other recommendations a little more credible.

Mr. Hoon: I am sure that my hon. Friends heard the hon. Gentleman's observations.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Ballistic missiles apart, can the Secretary of State guarantee that, as, when and if our troops are deployed into harm's way—from people such as Saddam Hussein—theatre missile defence will be in place to protect them in the same way that American, Italian, French and German troops have that protection?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman and I have debated the matter before. I have answered that question on several previous occasions, and I am not sure that we will take the matter further. I will not give guarantees of anything, as, clearly, it would not be appropriate at this stage to make the kind of assumptions that he is making. I want to make progress, because I have detained the House longer than I should have done.

Away from the policy issues, our armed forces are involved in a considerable number of active deployments around the world. The Ministry of Defence has been extremely busy over the past year. However, given the draw-down in Afghanistan, and with major reductions in prospect in the Balkans, there is now a healthier balance between our standing commitments and the resources available. Our armed forces have done, and are doing, excellent work. Afghanistan is now a significantly different nation from the one that existed a year ago. Freedom of expression and education has replaced the arbitrary authority of the Taliban regime. None the less, there is much work still to do in that country and, as the Prime Minister recently said, we will not abandon our newest ally until that work is completed. I am pleased to say that the Defence Minister of Afghanistan, Marshal Fahim Khan, will pay a visit to the United Kingdom shortly.

In the Balkans, we continue to support the international community's efforts to create new European states from the ruins of Yugoslavia. Our work in Sierra Leone has been a model of how the determination and professionalism of our forces can change lives. When we arrived there, the elected Government were close to collapse, rebels were carrying out terrible atrocities almost at will, and the nation faced a bleak future. Today, Sierra Leone is rebuilding. We have put a great deal of effort into security sector reform, together with the Department for International Development, to reinforce democratic control of the armed forces. Similar efforts have been made with the Sierra Leonean police. There is now peace, increasing economic success, elections and real hope for the future.

David Winnick: Does my right hon. Friend recall the ferocious opposition to military intervention in Kosovo and Afghanistan? Is it not the case that, had we listened to the critics, Milosevic would not be in the dock but would have continued in power in Belgrade—ethnic cleansing would have continued to a worse degree than had already happened—and the Taliban would still be in power in Afghanistan? Have the critics, to my right hon. Friend's knowledge, apologised and explained that they were wrong at the time?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It is clear that, in all of the examples that he has given, the international community initially sought a diplomatic and political route to achieve those ends. Clearly, there have been occasions when a diplomatic and political route has been successful in avoiding conflict and bringing about a peaceful and sensible resolution. Equally, he rightly points out the occasions on which it has been necessary to back that diplomacy with a threat, or, ultimately, with the use of force. On occasions, that has also proved successful.

Mrs. Mahon *rose—*

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire) *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: To be fair to the House, I should make progress, but I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes).

Mr. Barnes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that some Labour Members who gave support in connection with Kosovo in particular, and also in relation to Afghanistan—although there was criticism of how the action took place—do not support in any set of circumstances the planned military action in connection with Iraq? Different arguments operate in different cases.

Mr. Hoon: I accept that proposition entirely. It is for each and every Member of the House to reach his or her conclusion on these questions. I accept that, in different circumstances, there will be different approaches.

Mrs. Mahon: Having recently visited Kosovo, not for the first time, may I ask my right hon. Friend, who claims

that the action there was a success, when nearly 250,000 people from ethnic minorities who were expelled from Kosovo will be able to return there? The report that we received was not very positive. When will there be a report to the House on what happened to the 1,300 people who have disappeared since the NATO bombing?

Mr. Hoon: I, too, have been regular visitor to Kosovo since British troops first went there. All that I would say to my hon. Friend is that clearly there are problems. No one pretends that it is easy to move from a situation in which tens of thousands of people were losing their lives or were threatened with losing their lives and in which the most appalling atrocities were committed. I accept that there are still significant difficulties. The Government and I have argued consistently that we would like the Serbs to return to their homes and work in Kosovo.

Mrs. Mahon: Not just the Serbs.

Mr. Hoon: Indeed; and the other minorities, many of whom have left Kosovo. However, that aim will not be achieved without the restoration of confidence in the political structures available in that part of the world. As my hon. Friend knows, that process takes time, but it is not helped by running down the efforts that the international community has made so far to avert the type of humanitarian catastrophe that was so long a feature of Kosovo at the hands Milosevic.

Against the successes, we must not forget the many continuing challenges around the world, not least the tension between India and Pakistan. I visited both countries at the beginning of July in an effort to maintain the diplomatic momentum. There are issues on both sides, which must be resolved. Full and substantive dialogue between the two countries must be the ultimate goal. Defence diplomacy, an initiative launched in the strategic defence review, has an important part to play therefore.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hoon: No, I must finish my speech.

Defence diplomacy involves building key relationships with military and diplomatic personnel in countries across the world, sharing our experience and expertise. Those relationships give us rapid and direct access to decision makers in questions such as over-fly rights or forward basing. In some cases, we are building relationships with states that supported terrorism in the past, helping them to join the international community as full partners. The Ministry of Defence is greatly aided in this by support from other Departments, such as the Department for International Development and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

This has been—and continues to be—one of the most challenging times for defence in recent years. We face difficult choices. We will need to show resolve, but we will not be deflected from pursuing our strategic goals, forming new alliances and demonstrating the professionalism, dedication and determination of Britain's armed forces as a force for good in the world.

2.52 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement on missile defence. Although it does not constitute a change of policy or involve a marked shift in expenditure or a commitment to a particular programme, it marks a considerable shift in his tone. I did not come to the Chamber today with the intention of majoring on the subject of missile defence, because I took the view that, after the Bali attack, to carry on highlighting the absence of ministerial commitment to missile defence would do nothing but add to public anxiety. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman's timing is well chosen. The public require reassurance on this issue. Weapons proliferation continues and we know that investigation into possible programmes has continued in the right hon. Gentleman's Department and that the NATO working party, in which the UK is a prime facilitator, has continued its work on missile defence, so it has become increasingly ridiculous for the Government to insist that "no decisions have been made."

I very much welcome the movement that the Secretary of State has made today, but I must point out that Her Majesty's Opposition have been pleading with the Government on this issue for some time; my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition raised the issue of missile defence long before the last election, and such a statement from the Secretary of State was long overdue. I welcome it unreservedly and look forward to seeing the papers that he will lay before the House and to engaging in the debate that he says he will now welcome.

I stress a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer). At a recent conference that I attended on missile defence, it was noticeable that Britain is virtually the only country in Europe that is not well down the track of developing a deployable theatre missile defence system. I have no desire to set hares running as I have no doubt that whatever is required to protect forces in theatre will be provided, but my hon. Friend deserves a fuller answer in the fullness of time than the Secretary of State felt able to give today. As we embark on this debate, I see nothing to be gained on the Government's part unless there is absolute openness. At a time when public anxiety about terrorist attacks and weapons of mass destruction is running high, surely we should do everything that we can to reassure the public and give them confidence in what we are saying and doing.

I also welcome the Secretary of State's statement about the SA80 A2, and I am grateful for the notice that he gave me earlier today of his intention to raise this matter. He has put an important statement on the record. It is one thing for senior military officers to stake their reputations on this matter, but it is also right that the Ministers who are responsible for taking the decision put their views clearly on the record. I very much welcome the fact that that has happened today. I am grateful to the Government for the briefing that I received on the SA80 A2.

The decisive factor will be the confidence of soldiers and the Royal Marines, and it is their judgment that I will trust. I believe that the Government have every right to think that the soldiers and Royals Marines will have confidence in the weapon when the new arrangements and the necessary equipment are issued and the further

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modification is carried out. However, we will not let the matter drop if soldiers do not show confidence in the weapon on which they might have to stake their lives.

The background to the debate is the dreadful atrocities committed in Bali last weekend. The facts are stark. The initial evidence suggests that this was a highly practised and skilful attack. The blast was directed at the Sari nightclub and reminiscent of the expertise of the most skilful terrorist organisation in the world, the Provisional IRA.

It has further come to light that Jemaah Islamiyah has a long record of sending young Islamic scholars to the same fundamentalist Islamic schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan as bin Laden's al-Qaeda. Jemaah Islamiyah is embedded in the bloody concept of jihad, and its sister terrorist organisation in Indonesia, Ngruki, has had terrorist training in Afghanistan. Can there be any doubt that this attack is at least associated with al-Qaeda and should definitely be included in the war on terrorism?

We must ask ourselves where such groups are next likely to strike. There have already been further bomb attacks in the Philippines and we must be prepared for, and expect, a constant stream of attempts to cause terrorist atrocities anywhere in the world. That means our own country. The message that came out of 11 September last year is that we live in a far less predictable world than we thought. I am afraid that the Bali attack does nothing to allay those fears.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman, on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, agree that predictability depends on intelligence? Her Majesty's Government set an example when we were recalled in the recess to debate Iraq. They created a precedent by providing intelligence information, including from MI6, on the threat from Iraq. Does he agree that that precedent should be followed? Should not information from the intelligence services on threats from any terrorist organisation, domestic or international, be placed before the House in the way that it was in September? That was an example of open government.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, but I do not feel qualified to give him a full and frank answer. That would require deep consideration. He is trying to take me down a path that I do not want to follow, certainly not today. However, his point is well made and I have no doubt that Ministers have listened, so perhaps they will respond at the end of the debate.

The point about the Bali bombing is that it confirms the nature of the security environment in which we now live. As Lord Robertson, the Secretary General of NATO, has predicted, we can look forward to more instability, more conflicts spilling over into neighbouring countries and regions and more terrorism. It is appropriate that we pay tribute to the security services for the number of attacks that they have succeeded in foiling since 11 September. There will be more failed states, both rogue states and those with essentially benign or good governments struggling against the odds that we have seen in Indonesia, and more proliferation, as we have seen today with the US Administration's confirmation about a nuclear weapons programme in North Korea. The question that we must ask ourselves, which lies at the heart of everything we do as we consider defence in the world, is how we counter that.

Jeremy Corbyn: Obviously I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the terrible nature of the Bali bombing and the terrible loss of life there. Is he concerned, however, that the Indonesian armed forces, which may receive support from western Governments in future, have a poor human rights record? Their activities in West Papua and Aceh are deplorable, as are those of the Indonesian militia. Is not this the time to encourage the Indonesian Government to have civilian control of their armed forces rather than the virtually independent state that they now enjoy?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall turn to how we should help Indonesia later in my speech, and I promise the hon. Gentleman that I will address that point.

The next question is how the Bali bombing affects our attitude to Iraq. First, I entirely concur with the Prime Minister that there is, as he explained so eloquently to the House on Tuesday, a connection between terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. As he put it, both issues are threats and,

"the same type of fanaticism and extremism is driving both threats."

He continued,

"if we allow unstable states—with oppressive and dictatorial regimes—to develop weapons of mass destruction and also allow the terrorist groups to operate, we can be confident that the two threats will . . . at some point come together."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 186.]

There is therefore no question of our adjusting policy towards Iraq in light of what happened in Bali.

Furthermore, let us not be squeamish about considering the likelihood of terrorist connections with the Saddam Hussein regime. Shards of evidence are constantly emerging which all point in the same direction. Recently it was announced:

"Mansour Thaer has been charged with conspiracy of involvement with criminal association and is under arrest in Germany. Thaer has been investigated . . . for his links with a terrorist cell, and for participation in criminal conspiracy to traffic in arms, explosives, chemical weapons, identity papers, receiving stolen goods and aiding illegal immigration."

Mansour Thaer is an Iraqi national, born in Iraq and probably operating under the control of the Iraqi Government.

Mr. Sarwar: Eleven of those involved in the attacks of 11 September—in fact the majority of those involved—were Saudi nationals. The hon. Gentleman is accusing Iraq; is he saying that Saudi Arabia has links with terrorism?

Mr. Jenkin: I do not think that the Saudi Government have willing links with terrorism, but if the hon. Gentleman is referring to the origin of some of the money for terrorist organisations, I certainly share his concern. The difference between the Iraqi Government

and the Saudi Government is that the Saudi Government recognise that this is a problem but the Iraqi Government make it their policy.

Geraint Davies: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of a report released today by the Council on Foreign Relations, written by a group headed by the former heads of the CIA and the FBI, which complains about Saudi Arabia's intransigence on the subject of providing al-Qaeda with access to funding sources in Saudi Arabia, and indicates that George Bush is not using the USA's full power and influence to combat terrorism funding from Saudi Arabia? Is the hon. Gentleman concerned about that?

Mr. Jenkin: I will not be sidetracked on to that subject. We all know that there are problems with a number of regimes in several regions, and we can bounce them all off the problem of Iraq. The fact is that Iraq is the most immediate threat and the one that we must deal with as a priority.

A recent letter to Senator Bob Graham, chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, from George Tenet, director of central intelligence, made it clear that

"the likelihood of Saddam using W.M.D. for blackmail, deterrence or otherwise grows as his arsenal builds."

George Tenet confirms:

"We have solid reporting of senior level contacts between Iraq and Al Qaeda going back a decade. Credible information indicates that Iraq and Al Qaeda have discussed safe haven and reciprocal nonaggression . . . we have solid evidence of the presence in Iraq of Al Qaeda members, including some that have been in Baghdad. We have credible reporting that Al Qaeda leaders sought contacts in Iraq who could help them acquire W.M.D. capabilities."

The letter goes on. Should not we trust the representatives of democratically elected Governments rather than the word of an evil dictator such as Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Will the hon. Gentleman concede that the same person said in the same communication with Congress that Saddam Hussein was not an immediate threat to the United States and that his greatest threat to the US would be from the use of chemical weapons in retaliation to a pre-emptive strike?

Mr. Jenkin: The corollary of that point is that the hon. Gentleman would not support even UN-sanctioned military action against Iraq. If we are to be deterred by the possibility that Saddam Hussein might retaliate, we had better pack up and go home now. I do not think that that is the hon. Gentleman's policy. Furthermore, I think that he is misconstruing George Tenet's letter, which was occasioned by some people in the United States trying to misconstrue the evidence provided by a witness. The letter said:

"In the above dialogue, the witness's qualifications—'in the foreseeable future, given the conditions we understand now'—were intended to underscore that the likelihood of Saddam using W.M.D. for blackmail, deterrence or otherwise grows as his arsenal builds."

Would the hon. Gentleman like to let the arsenal of weapons of mass destruction grow, along with the threat that they represent, or would he prefer to deal with them now?

Mr. Henderson: Will the hon. Gentleman consider that the question whether a threat grows as an arsenal grows is different from the question whether Saddam Hussein's current arsenal is a threat to the United States in the absence of any awareness by Saddam Hussein's regime that Iraq is likely to be the subject of a pre-emptive strike?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is going to the heart of the matter, which is why I invited the Secretary of State to join in the debate about how we assess an imminent threat as we consider our self-defence in the new strategic environment. Again I invite the Secretary of State to join in. This is an important debate, and to gloss over it and pretend that there is nothing new in the philosophy of our defence in the new environment is not reassuring. We should be seeking openly to debate it and provide reassurance. There is no doubt in my mind that Saddam Hussein constitutes an imminent threat, and that may be the difference between him and me.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Surely, the point of even considering pre-emption is that it should be undertaken before the threat becomes so severe that we dare not take any action. On the very important passages that my hon. Friend read out about possible links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, if such links exist, is there not a strong possibility at this very moment that the wave of al-Qaeda atrocities that is building up is designed precisely to try divert the west from attacking Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Jenkin: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend on that last point. That is why I am appalled that some people argue that we are fighting two different problems and say that the problem of Iraq is in a separate box. Such people argue that we should leave the Iraq problem—this is Liberal Democrat policy—and fight the war on terrorism. That is exactly what the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said and I have debated the matter with him. The idea that those problems are completely different is mistaken. They may be different theatres, but they are the same war, and in practice, the idea that we should allow two bombs in Bali to be an excuse for allowing the United Nations to let Saddam off the hook would be a disaster. What an invitation to terrorism that would be. The bombs in Bali must stiffen our resolve to confront threats wherever they emerge in the new security environment, and we should not be listening to the likes of the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Keetch: The hon. Gentleman is falling into the same trap as the Leader of the Opposition did when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) rightly destroyed him during the recall debate. We will take no lessons from his party, which did not support the Government's deployment of British troops to Sierra Leone or East Timor. We have said that we would be prepared to entertain the idea of military action against Iraq as a last resort, but only if it is consistent with international law and is supported by the House. We would also take into account the consequences of such action on the coalition of the campaign against terrorism that the Prime Minister and the President have so successfully brought together.

Mr. Jenkin: I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman should have the arrogance to believe that the Prime

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Minister and the President of the United States would use military force except as a last resort. The idea that our democratically elected Prime Minister would rush into war when it is not a last resort is extraordinary. I am afraid that those who express such views are playing on people's false fears instead of trying to reassure them, which I think is the job of politicians in this House.

David Winnick: With all due respect, I imagine that I am about the last person on the Labour Benches who would come to the defence of the Liberal Democrats. It happens that my views are very much the same as those expressed from the two Front Benches. However, when we debated the same subject on 24 September, much to my disappointment, a number of Opposition Members expressed views resembling those of Labour and Liberal Democrat critics. It is as well to bear in mind that, although the three main parties seem to be divided, a large majority fortunately seems in favour of the sort of action that may well be necessary to deal with somebody whom the hon. Gentleman rightly described as the very evil mass murderer and war criminal who continues to rule in Iraq.

Mr. Jenkin: I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's point. It is sad that anybody should try to score political or personal points in respect of such a serious matter instead of trying to debate the substantive issues.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Does my hon. Friend agree that the essence of a threat to the Iraqi regime is that it can be substantive only if we are united? Any Liberal Democrat cracks in that coalition will be exploited by the very people who we least want to exploit them.

Mr. Jenkin: I believe that unity is an advantage in an international coalition and at a national level, but it should never stifle debate. Although I disagree with what some hon. Members say in the House, I will do my damnedest to ensure that they have the right to say it. We must never forget that right, but I do not think that we should seek to score personal points on this matter.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I think that we have spent enough time on this topic. Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me for continuing, or does he wish to move on?

Paul Flynn: I only want to ask the hon. Gentleman why he does not agree with the CIA, which says that Iraq would be most likely to use weapons of mass destruction and to collaborate with terrorists not in the current situation or without an invasion, but if, following an invasion, Saddam Hussein saw himself as defeated, became hopeless, suicidal and desperate and let loose his biological and chemical weapons in an act of vengeance or allowed them to be used by al-Qaeda. Is not that the greatest danger that we face?

Mr. Jenkin: The greatest danger that we face is to do nothing and allow the danger to grow. How much harder it will be to confront the threat if, in five or 10 years' time, Saddam Hussein has a nuclear weapon or a long-range missile system that can deliver chemical warheads to European cities. That is the threat that we must confront and debate as "immediate" in the context of self-defence.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that we are not talking merely about the possibility of Saddam using the weapons, as we know that he has already used them and continues to do so, not least to attack his Kurdish population.

Mr. Jenkin: Indeed, the CIA, to which the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) referred, did no more than confirm exactly what happened in 1991 when Saddam Hussein attempted to use chemical and biological weapons and tried to deliver missiles on to neighbouring countries in order to deter the liberation of Kuwait. We did not allow that to deter us then and we must not do so now.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall move on.

Of course, the long-term objective on Iraq is disarmament. If that means regime change, our objective must be to create a stable and safe Iraq as a foundation for stability in the middle east—not a haven for suicide bombers. Do the Government look forward to a democratic Iraq? Iraq should be the second wealthiest country in the region and one of the principal world suppliers of crude oil. What provisions are the Government making for a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq? The Prime Minister himself said that he heartily desired regime change. In Washington, there has been talk of a post-Saddam occupation plan and the establishment of an American-led military Government in Iraq if the United States topples Saddam. The Government should be engaging in a similar debate.

Have the Government met representatives of opposition groups? I asked that question when we last debated this subject, but we have not had an answer. Are they involved in discussions about long-term transition to a stable Government? What level of diplomatic, economic and military commitment would the allies need to make in the event of the collapse of the Saddam regime? What is their assessment of the domestic opposition in Iraq and the question whether it would be hampered by internal divisions predating the Saddam regime?

Angus Robertson (Moray): The hon. Gentleman is asking the Government about their policy on a future for Iraq after Saddam Hussein. What is the policy of the Conservative party, especially with regard to the right of self-determination of the people of Kurdistan in Iraq?

Mr. Jenkin: Our view is that it would be undesirable for Iraq to break up. I have had meetings with representatives of the Kurdistan Government and meetings with representatives of the Iraqi opposition. However, the Conservatives are only the Opposition, and it is incumbent on the Government to have discussions, form a view and make proposals. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's specific question, there is a

danger of embracing an overtly federalist constitution that might reflect the current de facto self-rule of Kurdistan but cause alarm in the Turkish Government. The Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. Ecevit, has reacted angrily to the publication of such a constitution. We should be using our influence to ensure that whatever constitutional settlement might emerge in the event that the Saddam Hussein Government fall is likely to be stable and sustainable. With our influence in that region, Britain has a great role to play in that respect.

Angus Robertson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing yet another intervention. Surely the future set-up of a post-Saddam Hussein Government should be up to the people of Iraq, and nobody else.

Mr. Jenkin: The international community, as in Afghanistan, has a big role to play in facilitating the self-determination of the Iraqi people. At present they do not have self-determination in any meaningful or democratic sense. I would heartily embrace anything that we could do to improve that situation.

Indonesia, however, is not a rogue state. Unlike Iraq, the situation there is not something that might be helped by anything that could be construed as western military interference. Indonesia is a country that would benefit from as much hands-off support as possible. What are the Government offering to help the Indonesian Government to reform their armed forces and to increase their effectiveness? The hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) raised the matter earlier. There is no doubt that the Indonesian military is still emerging from the Suharto era, and needs better equipment, better communications, and a much stronger system of command and control and accountability. With our skills, Britain has a great deal to offer Indonesia in that regard, and I hope that we will offer positive help, rather than just criticising.

Will the Government offer Indonesia access to the UK's unrivalled expertise in anti-terrorist operations, in particular for forensic investigations and intelligence gathering? Those who have been watching, as I have, the scenes of devastation in Bali on our television screens have not seen the careful control of the evidence that lies on the streets and in the rubble of the buildings, as we would expect to see in this country. We have seen people laying wreaths on what might well constitute evidence to be used against those who perpetrated the bombing. That is the sort of expertise that I hope we could offer.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I must stop giving way, as so many hon. Members want to speak.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again and allowing me to intervene again on the subject of Indonesia. Perhaps he could address now the point that I raised earlier, concerning political control of the military, the apparently close relationship between the military and the militia, and the most appalling human rights abuses taking place in West Papua, where there are oil and many other mineral reserves that multinational companies wish to exploit, and in Aceh. Some of us were in East Timor at the time of the referendum. There is concern that the military and the militia are one and the same thing, and until that is resolved, any relationship with the military is extremely damaging to the human rights of ordinary people in that country.

Mr. Jenkin: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern. I raise the matter in my remarks because I believe that that is the sort of issue on which the British Government should be offering assistance to Indonesia.

What advice can we offer to help the Indonesian Government bring in the necessary legal reforms, like our anti-terrorist legislation? They are certainly behind what we would expect in other countries. We should bear in mind the fact that we are discussing one of the largest countries in the world, with a population of 220 million people—almost the size of the population of the United States, and comparable to the size of the European Union.

Given that tourism comprised up to one third of the Indonesian gross domestic product before the Bali atrocities, do the Government agree that there will need to be international action to stabilise the Indonesian economy, so that progress on economic and military reform and progress towards democracy in Indonesia can continue? One of the hallmarks of al-Qaeda's terrorist activities is to cause precisely such economic dislocation in order to damage the interests of the west, destabilise Governments and create fertile ground for more terrorism. Surely it should be one of our priorities to confront that.

Does not the example of Indonesia underline the fact that terrorism cannot be defeated by military means alone? I shall spend a few minutes arguing for a more comprehensive doctrine which we have heard enunciated against international terrorism. The principles of counter-insurgency warfare are not new. We have been practising them in Northern Ireland and on the British mainland against Northern Ireland terrorism for the past 30 years. They originate in the wars of the north-west frontier in the previous century and the Indian mutiny.

Those principles are, first, to secure one's own base and implement one's home defence; secondly, to deny the enemy a secure base—we have dealt with pre-emption, and I hope that we will discuss it further. The next principles are to generate best human intelligence, to remove underlying political grievances, to co-ordinate all one's actions to a strategic plan, and to remember that the battle is for hearts and minds, and that conflict is about willpower, not just physical force. A further principle is to remember that actions and words, including the technical, can have political and strategic consequences. Finally, it is important to stay within the law and to use proportionate force only as a last resort.

Winning hearts and minds must be the central theme of everything we do in the war against terrorism. Winning the war against terrorism is as much an act of persuasion as of coercion. Our actions must prove that we stand for all those human values that we are defending. We must not allow organisations such as al-Qaeda to create a pervasive state of war between the west and Islam, or between the west and the Arab world. We must address the political challenges and conflicts that serve as the feeding ground for terrorists. We must

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provide the humanitarian relief that shows that we are committed to the well-being of humanity throughout the world. We must develop the ability to help failing countries satisfy their people's social and economic needs. We must support and partner moderate Islam. We must open real dialogue and have real diplomacy with as many countries as possible around the world in the war against terrorism. I am shortly to visit Egypt, where I hope to learn as much as possible about the problems in the Gulf.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Can the hon. Gentleman say whether there are any other rogue nations against which it will be necessary to take pre-emptive action in the near future, such as North Korea?

Mr. Jenkin: No. Of course, diplomacy can function in the war against terrorism only if it is ultimately backed by the threat of military force. Both diplomacy and military action depend on broad international support and unity. I am surprised that the Secretary of State made little reference to the upcoming Prague summit. It is the drifting apart of the Atlantic alliance that is by far the most dangerous diplomatic development since 11 September last year. That could be seen as a principal objective of rogue states and terrorist organisations. How they must rub their hands with glee when they see Europe and the United States falling out about how to deal with the problem of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. I remind the House of one of the principles of counter-insurgency warfare: to co-ordinate all one's actions to a strategic plan. How can we achieve that unless we have an active and sustainable transatlantic alliance? That is why the NATO summit in Prague next month is a defining moment in the war against terrorism and for NATO itself.

There are three issues that need to be addressed. The first is to reform the structure for developing a joint understanding of threats and how to deal with them. That is what NATO did during the cold war. At the beginning of the cold war, NATO was a shadow of what it is now. It did not have the integrated command and military structure allowing senior military officers to sit down and discuss what the threats are, what the necessary responses are, and what national defence policies are needed to deal with those threats. That process in NATO must be revived.

Secondly, we need to develop military capabilities relevant to the modern threats. The Prague capability initiative will be a vital part of bringing the west together in the war against terrorism. Thirdly, we need to find the political will to act as an alliance to deal with those threats.

The Government should welcome the Rumsfeld proposal that there should be one or many NATO rapid reaction forces. We need forces—NATO forces, coalition forces—that are fast, lethal, superior to anything that they are likely to encounter and deployable way beyond our traditional borders. The UK, which developed the expeditionary concept in the defence review of the 1990s and in the strategic defence review, should be leading the initiative. Our armed forces are the best example of that initiative.

What will be the UK's contribution to the debate? The dangers that we face stem from the growing disparity between the United States' and the rest of NATO's military capabilities, which threatens NATO cohesion. For example, the United States currently provides 100 per cent. of NATO's standoff jamming capability, 90 per cent. of the air-to-ground surveillance and reconnaissance, and almost 80 per cent. of the air-to-air refuelling tankers necessary to conduct operations. There are 250 long-range transports available to NATO from the United States, while the rest of the alliance can provide merely 11. The United States has no more fighters and bombers than the European NATO members, but only a tiny fraction of the European fighters and bombers have precision-guided weapons while 100 per cent. of American fighters and bombers have such weapons.

Therefore, we fully support and welcome what the Foreign Secretary said in Chicago yesterday about the disparity between the United States and the rest of NATO:

"A relationship where one side of the Alliance disproportionately shoulders the military burden is a recipe for resentment."

That is a priority for the European countries of NATO to address.

The third issue that needs to be addressed is finding the political will—that is the other threat to cohesion in NATO—and how that will has been sapped by the European security and defence policy! How sensible it would be if we could get back to the "Berlin plus" arrangements that were approved in 1996 to create a European security and defence identity within the NATO alliance. The final communiqué of that Washington summit is littered with references to a European security and defence identity within NATO. It was to provide

"the use of separable but not separate military capabilities in operations led by"—

Europe

"and the participation of nations outside the alliance in operations such as IFOR".

Why did we depart from that formula and allow the creation of autonomous capabilities outside NATO?

The St. Malo declaration specifically departed from the "Berlin plus" proposals. It said that

"the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action".

This is the ESDP, not the ESDI.

The Nice treaty annexes provide for EU military forces that are independent of and autonomous from NATO. They provide for planning for military operations outside NATO; that the EU will decide on military operations and only "consult" NATO; and that the EU will retain full political and strategic control throughout any operation independent of NATO.

Since then, the EU has established an EU Political and Security Committee outside NATO, and an EU Military Committee, exactly mirroring and duplicating the NATO military committee, outside NATO. It has replicated the NATO military staffs in the EU military staffs and other organisations outside NATO, with a membership approaching 200 in a brand new building in Brussels. Finally, there is the commitment to a European rapid reaction force outside NATO, an embryo European army.

I noticed the Secretary of State muttering through all that. Does he deny it? Will he address it at the NATO summit? We know that the four non-NATO EU members will be attending the NATO summit. When will the disagreement between NATO and the EU that the Government have created be resolved?

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): Is it not surprising that, although we are on the eve of the NATO conference, the Secretary of State did not even mention the new European defence proposals?

Mr. Jenkin: Yes—particularly when it is an increasing source of anxiety in the American Administration and in NATO.

Dr. Julian Lewis: My hon. Friend gave us a long list of new offices and institutions that have been created on behalf of the EU rapid reaction force. Has the new EU rapid reaction force led to the addition of a single soldier, warship or aeroplane to Europe's defence capability?

Mr. Jenkin: I do not think so, but no doubt someone will try to tell us that it has.

Jim Knight: But surely that is the point. The notion of a European army is a fallacious misinterpretation, as we are not talking about creating a new set of soldiers and capability; we are talking about existing capability. If, for example, the United States does not want to act in our back yard, the EU is capable of doing so. If a European army is a way of bringing France into the fold—it is currently a little semi-detached from NATO—that is a good thing. If it is a way of giving us a capability and cranking up European capability that has been so slow to develop under NATO, surely the hon. Gentleman must welcome it.

Mr. Jenkin: All those things could have been achieved within the "Berlin plus" framework. The ESDP adds nothing to that framework; it only creates capabilities outside NATO. I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why it is a bad thing. First, it is wasteful of resources. It duplicates institutions and creates extra offices and ambassadors, more chauffeur-driven cars and more waste when we should be spending that money on additional military capability and not on bureaucracy.

Secondly, in times of crisis military planners provide options to political masters, which is what they do at SHAPE. Options a, b and c have certain sets of forces with certain risk factors. That is what they do in NATO. Why do we need to replicate and duplicate that capability when it is so dangerous to do so?

Jim Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall finish, if I may.

Thirdly, we do not want the European Union to decide that it wants battalion x when D-SACEUR has already assigned battalion x to another operation in another theatre. If there is to be military planning, it should be conducted under a single organisation—NATO. I am quoting liberally from the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Joseph Ralston, so these are not problems of my imagining; they are real problems. I have met General Dieter Stockman, the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and he is deeply concerned about the potential for conflict in the event that there are conflicting objectives between the EU and NATO. It should be for NATO to deconflict that military planning. We are not against increased European capability and we are not against European capability being used independently of the United States. What we are opposed to is the EU creating a rival to NATO that will undermine NATO at a crucial point in the history of our world when we need Europe and the United States to work together.

Finally, I want to address the new chapter of the strategic defence review that reiterates the Government's commitment to the expeditionary concept for our armed forces—a concept to which we are fully committed. I shall not dwell at length on overstretch, nor shall I engage in cheap political claptrap about increased expenditure in which the Secretary of State indulged. He will not admit the truth, which is that, even after three years, real terms expenditure will still be £1 billion a year less than the Government inherited from the previous Conservative Government. There is an anxiety that we are trying to obtain the same defence from less capability. I note that he skilfully timed the announcement of the decision about the short take off and vertical landing carrier capability just half an hour before he addressed the Labour party conference in Blackpool. The letter that he sent me told me that he was making that announcement for "commercial reasons". I shall not inquire what those reasons were, but it was awfully convenient for the right hon. Gentleman to be able to make such an announcement at such a time.

Why did the right hon. Gentleman not also announce the plans for the existing surface fleet? Why did he not tell the Labour party conference that difficult choices had to be made? He has now written to me, a week later, to say that HMS Sheffield is to be withdrawn from service. I do not know whether he has plans to reduce the surface navy by 10 ships, but we get a stream of documents from the Government that tell us the good news but not the bad news. At least when we produced defence reviews, they were full of bad news and good news. That may have been unwelcome for the armed forces at the time, but at least it was honest. Why do not the Government give us the good news and the bad news? Why do they not let us have a proper debate about how we should spend the limited resources that we have for the armed forces, instead of smuggling out announcements as though these things were not really happening?

We have the best armed forces in the world. They have a significant role to play internationally, particularly in the war against terrorism. Judging by the way in which the arguments tend to be conducted, however, it is small wonder that so many armed service men have become so cynical about politicians. The least that we should promise them is a proper debate. Moreover, the capabilities required for our defence and

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our national security, and to fulfil our international commitments, should be fully funded, and that is a commitment that we will continue to make.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): May I remind right hon. and hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches?

3.41 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I wish to concentrate on the prospect of war with Iraq, but may I first briefly comment on the statement that the Secretary of State has just made about missile defence? He commented on how successful the recent tests had been, but he did not mention the fact that there had been considerable suspicion in the US media when it was announced that the tests carried out in recent months were to be conducted in conditions of much greater secrecy, and that it was suspected that that was because of a certain lack of realism. I realise that rogue state dictators are supposed to be irrational, but it is just conceivable that they would not phone up in advance to ensure that the interceptors knew about the timing and the trajectory of the missile, that there was good weather for the interception, that the quantity and quality of decoys was small and, in one case, that there was a signalling beacon on the front of the warhead.

It should also be remembered that the Ministry of Defence's own White Paper, looking ahead 30 years, suggested that missile attack was a low risk, and that the US national intelligence estimate gave a series of cogent reasons to Congress why the method likely to be used by any so-called rogue dictator or terrorist trying to deliver weapons of mass destruction would be to smuggle them in, rather than launch a missile attack.

It has been asked whether missile defence should be seen as similar to the star wars system. Of course it should not. The proponents of star wars were Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Perle, whereas the proponents of missile defence are Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Perle. The aims of star wars were ultimately to get complete military invulnerability for the United States on a unilateral basis. The aim of the new missile defence system is, as Donald Rumsfeld has said, ultimately to build towards full-spectrum dominance. Indeed, the connection between star wars and the war on Iraq is that they are both part of the same frightening, unilateralist agenda that we saw spelled out in the national security strategy.

On the prospects of war with Iraq, the Prime Minister asked what was surely the most pertinent question: why now? We now have the dossier, the report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the report from the director of central intelligence in the United States. Looking at them, it is perfectly clear that they find no evidence of a link between Iraq and the events of 11 September. In fact, there is no cogent evidence in the reports of any association between Iraq and al-Qaeda.

In the British document, human rights are mentioned. Undoubtedly, when we consider the atrocities that have been committed in Iraq, regime change has been vitally necessary for more than two decades. But what has changed since the 1980s, when Donald Rumsfeld was supplying aid and arms to Saddam Hussein, to convince him that it is now imperative for us to have a war with Saddam Hussein? Most of the atrocities occurred in the 1980s.

What about the reports on missiles? It is suspected in the different reports that Saddam Hussein might have retained somewhere between two and two dozen al-Hussein missiles, and that he has probably developed a limited number of other missiles that might be able to go as far as 200 km. It is clear, however, that his missile forces are massively depleted compared with before the Gulf war, and that his missile strength is weak compared with that of many other countries.

On biological and chemical weapons, the presumption is that Saddam Hussein has restarted his programmes and that he has probably managed to retain some biological and chemical resources from before the end of the inspections regime, and to develop more since. Again, however, it is believed that his stocks are vastly smaller than they were in the 1980s, when all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—including the United States and the United Kingdom—were busily helping him with supplies for missile technology and for biological and chemical weapons.

Llew Smith: Read the Scott report.

Mr. Savidge: Exactly.

What about nuclear weapons? Again, the reports are in agreement that Saddam Hussein does not yet have them. They also agree that he is several years away from getting them unless he obtains weapons-grade material.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way; he is typically generous.

Surely the point is that Saddam Hussein was within two years of getting a nuclear weapon before the last war against Iraq, and that suicidal terrorist movements have grown up recently that might work in conjunction with him to undertake actions that were not so great a threat in the intervening years.

Mr. Savidge: The CIA was asked to produce a report on whether it thought that Saddam Hussein was co-operating with terrorist organisations to supply them with weapons of mass destruction, and it came up with the conclusion that he was not.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Savidge: I must be careful, because every time I give way I lose time. I will see whether there is an opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to come in later.

On the supply of weapons-grade material, there is obviously a major proliferation problem, not least because of the risk that terrorist organisations could obtain it, and we need to work together on non-proliferation. Would Saddam Hussein have the intention to use weapons of mass destruction if he obtained them? He has undoubtedly used them in the past—he used poisoned gas against both the Iranians and his own people. Can he be deterred from using them

again? The assumption of the US hard right is that he cannot, because they define him as a rogue state dictator, and they say that all such dictators are irrational and could not therefore be deterred by the thought of nuclear annihilation. That is the danger of trying to fit people into nice ideological definitions. The real Saddam Hussein may be—and, indeed, is—a homicidal maniac, but there is no reason to suppose that he is a suicidal maniac. In fact, he has had a murderous obsession with preserving his own life. During the Gulf war, Saddam was deterred from using chemical or biological weapons by the threat of overwhelming retaliation.

There are concerns that there might be some new element of secret intelligence that is not being shared with us. I suspect that the evidence suggests that that is not the case. The main proponents of this war—Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Perle and Bolton, for example—were advocating this war in 1998, when they were in opposition and not in receipt of the best military intelligence. They have been advocating it for years; it is not something that they have just thought up.

The Prime Minister stated last month that we should not underestimate the extent to which

"11 September had made a difference to the way that America views such things"—[*Official Report*, 24 September 2002; Vol. 390, c. 22.]

It naturally had an immense effect on US public opinion, and we all respect that. However, we should contrast the Prime Minister's comments with the words of Condoleeza Rice in an interview with *The New Yorker* on 1 April. She said that shortly after the events of 11 September, she called together the leaders of the National Security Council and asked:

"How do you capitalise on these opportunities"

fundamentally to change US policies? The US hawks have shamelessly exploited 11 September to promote a predetermined agenda.

We should remember that project for the new American century, with which so many prominent people in the US Administration are closely involved, argued in the month of Bush's inauguration that if neither weapons of mass destruction nor Saddam Hussein existed, it would still be in the US strategic interest to invade Iraq. Surely that is the answer to the question, "Why now?"

Does anyone suppose that if Al Gore had been recognised as the winner of the presidential election we would now be considering war with Iraq? Does anyone believe that we would be contemplating such a step if George Bush had not chosen to appoint several extreme hawks to key posts in his Administration? Those hawks have advocated pre-emptive war against not only Iraq but various other countries.

I do not doubt that the British Government regard war as a last resort or that they want inspections and disarmament, but I have grave doubts about whether all the members of the Bush Administration view war as a last resort. We are supposed to take comfort from George Bush's statement that going to war is not his first choice.

The Prime Minister asked us to take comfort from the speech in Cincinnati, in which the President stated that disarmament was one of his objectives. However, that speech contained some worrying elements. The President said that Saddam was preparing to send unmanned aerial vehicles to attack the United States with biological and chemical weapons. I would have hoped that the President of the United States might have been aware of the existence of the Atlantic ocean and the US Air Force.

The President also suggested that Saddam Hussein might be trying to supply nuclear weapons to terrorist organisations. First, his intelligence reports state that Saddam Hussein does not yet have nuclear weapons. Secondly, the report that George Tenet was reluctantly forced to release after he had been interviewed by the Senate made it clear that he estimated that Saddam was not supplying weapons and would not wish to do that. The circumstances under which he might use his weapons of mass destruction or supply them to terrorists or agents would be precisely if he was attacked and faced the possibility of his extinction.

The President apparently ignores his intelligence advice to pursue a domestic political agenda. Worse, he is engaging in dangerous scaremongering. That can far too easily be the prelude to warmongering.

We should recognise the dangers of war, as defined by former President Clinton in Blackpool. We should acknowledge that we need a United Nations resolution, but that it should be fair. There should be a second element to such a resolution. We should leave it not to the United States but to the United Nations to decide whether compliance occurs and whether there is a need for force.

I am rushing rapidly to a conclusion—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

3.54 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I associate Liberal Democrat Members with the Secretary of State's words about members of the armed forces and the civil servants who work at the Ministry of Defence. I have been privileged to get to know them in recent years and they are a fine bunch of people.

The events of recent days add a timely significance to today's debate. International terrorism has touched our lives again and continues to threaten world security. As we remember those who died last weekend from this country and elsewhere, and the appalling events of 11 September, we must redouble our efforts to root out the scourge of international terrorism.

As the Secretary of State rightly said, we can effectively combat international terrorism only if we co-operate with other nations. The coalition that the Prime Minister and President Bush assembled so successfully last year remains our strongest weapon for defeating that threat. We live in an interconnected world where intelligence and police co-operation in third countries can save lives at home. No single nation can prevent all attacks against its citizens, but together we can isolate and defeat terrorist networks.

The nature of the international terrorist threat has added to the tasks of our armed forces, not changed them. Deterrence, coercion or find-and-strike operations have not replaced the existing roles of the

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armed forces but simply added to them. The major defence tasks identified by the strategic defence review remain valid. Stabilisation, peace enforcement, defence diplomacy and commitments in the Balkans, Afghanistan and elsewhere demand our continued engagement.

The Secretary of State said outside the House that prioritisation of capabilities will be necessary. That process clearly began with the series of cuts that were announced over the summer. We were told that the new chapter was supposed to rebalance, not replace the SDR in the light of a growing terrorist threat. However, I fear that it is being replaced.

A steady stream of leaked documents and unannounced Government publications revealed a picture of cuts, revised targets and shortfalls. Many SDR requirements now appear unrealistic. The revision of the SDR seems to have been forced on the Government. Less than five months ago in May, we were assured that HMS Sheffield would be held in extended readiness until September 2004.

Moreover, the SDR commits the Government to maintaining 32 warships until 2007. With HMS Nottingham probably beyond repair, and HMS Sheffield due to be withdrawn in two weeks, the number is down to 30. I know HMS Sheffield well; I spent 10 days on her as part of my time with the armed forces parliamentary scheme, with which many hon. Members have been involved. The ship was in the Caribbean carrying out anti-drug-running activities. It is neither the first nor the last ship to do that.Only 10 days ago, HMS Grafton seized $100 million of high-grade cocaine. That ship plays an important role in the defence of the United Kingdom. Yet the Government have cut our West Indies guardships.

Is the Secretary of State prepared to take a hard look at items that no longer add to our capability and prioritise in favour of critical capabilities? What exactly does he consider to be critical capabilities?

The Liberal Democrats welcomed the announcement that confirmed the designs of the future aircraft carrier and the joint strike fighter aircraft. It was a wise decision to choose a design that offers greater operational flexibility for the future. However, it is less encouraging that the decision may have been made to meet an in-service date of 2012. Procurement policy should not be made in that way.

If the Government had not been in such a hurry to retire the Sea Harriers, the urgency of the capability gap would have been less pressing. Are there other imminent cuts about which the Secretary of State would like to inform the House? Is there anything else up his sleeve?

We view Britain's defence role in the world as undiminished. The responsibilities are many, at home and abroad. If we are to fulfil the role outlined by the SDR, we must commit the necessary resources to our military. If we cannot provide the armed forces with the equipment, pay and conditions that they need to do the job that we ask of them, the UK must accept greater limitations on the defence tasks that we undertake.

We must improve recruitment and retention rates in our armed forces. We must stem the loss of critical staff from organisations such as the defence medical services. We must reach a position where we no longer need to waste money on temporary housing or temporary doctors. We must ensure that our armed forces and their families are well looked after, with fair pay and equitable pension rights. Failure to fix the nuts and bolts of our armed forces will put future operations in jeopardy.

What role should Britain play in the world? The SDR acknowledged the consensus that has been supported by Opposition parties in recent years. It envisaged a role for Britain as a major military power with a duty to contribute to NATO, UN and EU tasks, commensurate with our position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. That role has grown in ways anticipated by the SDR, which emphasised the global nature of Britain's interests, of the 10 million British citizens living abroad as well as Britain's overseas territories. The SDR said that a global capability remained necessary. We believe that it is necessary. We believe also that the SDR represents a broad consensus. It set targets for policies and the implementation of objectives. However, if the foundations of the SDR remain valid, the policies in place to implement it need to be revised.

With procurement dates continuing to slip, with retention rates dropping and with what appears to be an ad hoc announcement of cuts in aircraft and warship numbers, the SDR is parting from our armed forces in terms of day-to-day reality. We must be assured that the commitments made by the Government at the time of the SDR—they were broadly supported by both sides of the House—can be sustained.

I shall say a few words about arms exports. Our troops are deployed abroad to control instability and to contribute to peace. We must ensure that our actions in other spheres—for example, arms exports—do not undermine our troops' efforts. I agree with the Secretary of State's recent comments that competition over time should be a consideration in defence procurement decisions. However, in his exhortation to the defence industry to export more and in committing the taxpayer to facilitating market access, the Government may be focusing on domestic concerns that are related to global security. Even today, we have seen Lord Bach and Prince Andrew promoting British arms exports with taxpayers' money in the middle east. That was at a fair attended by Iraq. Am I alone in feeling a need for caution?

Arms exports are a major source of global instability when they are diverted from their intended destination and use. Therefore, rigorous end-use monitoring of British exports is vital. I believe that the only true way to minimise the damaging consequences of irresponsible arms transfers, such as the arms-to-Iraq issue, which was discussed earlier, is to have prior parliamentary scrutiny on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Wilkinson: The hon. Gentleman is making a most important point. Does he not agree that it is infinitely better for British interests and for the promotion of the values that our armed forces have sustained that British companies should sell weapons to states that require them for their self-defence, rather than that those states should turn to other suppliers such as Belarus, Iraq and rogue regimes? The training and support that our

personnel provide in the continued collaboration that follows an arms agreement is most useful in the longer term.

Mr. Keetch: I agree entirely. However, the hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that in the past the problem has been that we have sold arms to regimes that have come back to bite us. We know, for example, that arms were sold to Argentina and were used against the taskforce. We actually supported and supplied arms to Saddam Hussein. We even supplied in the past to Osama bin Laden. We must be careful about the company that we keep. We need to continue to examine carefully the issue of arms exports.

Let me move on to alliances. We maintain our forces for the defence of the nation. However, we also have commitments to our allies in NATO, the EU and the Commonwealth. The SDR acknowledged that Britain's

"economic and political future is as part of Europe"

and that

"Britain's security is indivisible from that of Europe."

I agree. However, the integration of European defence capabilities has not been progressed far enough. The UK has indeed led the way in raising defence expenditure, and we have been told that France followed suit. However, progress on meeting the Helsinki headline goals has been painfully slow. Co-operation within Europe on research, procurement, logistics support and even on intelligence could promise increased effectiveness and cost savings. It is long overdue.

Next month's NATO summit in Prague will discuss precisely the same issues that face Europe: a NATO response to terrorism, the creation of a rapid response force and the standardisation of equipment for interoperability. Those are sensible goals for NATO and for the EU under the framework of the European security and defence policy.

During my recent trip to NATO headquarters, all the officials whom I met, including the Secretary General, stressed the importance of the ESDP to NATO. Lord Robertson also stressed the importance of resolving the dispute between Greece and Turkey over the European use of NATO assets. What does the Secretary of State have in mind? Will he ensure that the disagreement does not lead to progress on the ESDP faltering?

I turn to Iraq and the comments of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). We must accept that there is a diverging range of opinions among all parties in the House. Indeed, many former senior Conservative Members—for example, Lord Hurd, Sir Malcolm Rifkind and John Major—have said that they disagree with, or have some concerns about, the current Conservative party leadership on Iraq. It is not only those people, who the present leadership of the Conservative party have tried to airbrush out of history; in the debate that took place on 24 September, many Conservative Back-Benchers made eloquent speeches that did not fully echo the approach taken by those on their Front Bench. I have in mind the hon. Members for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor), for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), and there were others.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), who sadly is not in his place, criticises Liberal Democrat Members for asking questions at a time when British troops might be committed. I say to him that it is exactly at the time when our troops are committed that we should be asking questions. That is what opposition is. Had Opposition parties in 1940 blindly followed the Government of the day in military expeditions, the House would not have challenged Neville Chamberlain in the way that it did and his Government would not have been replaced by the coalition Government who were led so wonderfully by Winston Churchill. Now is the time to ask important questions.

If the UN or the international community request British help in neutralising threats to global security, we must be there. However, to be consistent with international law, every other reasonable political and diplomatic option must be exhausted before military action commences. It is not correct to pose a choice between dealing with Iraq and dealing with al-Qaeda. They are linked. Any action in Iraq must be seen in the context of a wider campaign against terrorism.

The question that we must ask, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) did so eloquently on Wednesday, is whether possible action in Iraq will increase or decrease the likelihood of further terrorist attacks throughout the world. Whether to use force in the absence of an immediate terrorist attack is one of the most difficult decisions that this country may be asked to make for a generation. We must be sure that any decisions reflect the will of the people.

Let us have a new constitutional innovation. Let us have, perhaps, a new war powers Act. Let us abolish the Prime Minister's power to use the Royal Prerogative to send Britain's forces to war without having to seek parliamentary approval. The President of the United States has sought and gained a mandate—

Dr. Julian Lewis: May I give the hon. Gentleman a scenario to consider? Let us suppose that the Prime Minister is in possession of top-secret intelligence information that he cannot share with the House. What would then happen in the situation that the hon. Gentleman has described?

Mr. Keetch: I know and understand that some Members believe that it should be the Government's responsibility. However, I believe that in normal circumstances—certainly those that we are discussing in terms of Iraq—there should be a substantive vote. If top-secret intelligence were available to the Prime Minister suggesting that an attack might be imminent, surely he could discuss it under normal Privy Council terms with members of the leading Opposition parties and then seek their approval. In circumstances where we are deploying British forces, I do not see why there should not be a substantive vote in the House.

When we send our forces into the field they have the right to be confident that the country backs them. It is important that they fight with the knowledge that it is Parliament that has asked them to go, and that it is we who bear the responsibilities. The President of the United States has sought and received such a mandate from Congress; I do not see why our Prime Minister should be any different. As elected Members, we are answerable to the people of Britain. A new war powers Act would lay the mantle of accountability where it

[Mr. Keetch]

correctly lies: with Parliament. It could only enhance our democracy and people's faith in our democratic institutions.

4.9 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): If two antagonists both deploy military forces for attack, the military balance is unstable because either side might gain an advantage from striking first. That was the nature of the balance of strategic nuclear weapons during the cold war. The concept of mutually assured destruction is still the basis of the strategic balance of offensive weapons between the old cold war antagonists. However, a missile might be fired in error or a malicious or deranged officer may become convinced that the circumstances are right for first strike to gain an advantage. Either possibility could trigger a devastating response that no Government intended. To address those and other problems, Presidents Bush and Putin, to their credit, recently agreed to cut their strategic nuclear weapons by two thirds, but that still leaves 2,000 nuclear missiles on each side, plus weapons owned by the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and so on. When the use of any one of those weapons would be a disaster for the world, that remains a frightening arsenal.

Let us imagine a notable success in arms reduction negotiations so that both sides have no more than a few hundred nuclear weapons each. How do they get below that number? Any move to reduce towards zero will raise suspicions that side A will secretly retain a capability and so leave side B exposed if it complies by reducing to zero. The inevitable suspicion will mean that neither side will ever voluntarily reduce weapons to zero. It was because of similar suspicions that mutual and balanced forced reductions of conventional forces could not be agreed in the past.

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty was intended to limit the spread of such weapons outside the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China. It has not succeeded. India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea all possess nuclear weapons. That encourages states with which they may come into conflict to acquire them too. Containment is a vain hope, especially when both nuclear and ballistic technology are transferred between states or by the migration of experts from the Soviet Union.

A missile defence system, such as the one under discussion, may provide a solution to those problems. First, it would enable a strategic balance to be achieved by means of defensive weapons that is essentially stable, unlike the inherent instability that goes with a balance of offensive weapons. Secondly, the risk of a nuclear exchange being triggered in error by an insubordinate or maverick custodian would be eliminated. Thirdly, a missile defence shield, available to both sides, would provide a climate for safe negotiation towards zero arsenals of nuclear weapons. Fourthly, it would give direct protection against the malicious acts of rogue states. Fifthly, if countries can be offered a place under a missile defence umbrella, they have everything to gain from signing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

What then are the obstacles to all that becoming a reality? A major objection is that the missile defence system proposed today is no more than a rehash of President Reagan's star wars concept. Not only was star wars technologically impossible to achieve, it would have made the world a more dangerous place. It would have nullified the deterrent effect of the Soviet Union's strategic weapons, so creating the possibility of a pre-emptive strike against the star wars system or of an arms race. Those objections were, and remain, valid, but that is not the missile defence system that the United States now proposes. The concept is of a system that could withstand an attack of up to 100 missiles at most. It could not therefore wipe out Russia's ability to respond to a United States attack, so it would not upset the current strategic balance. On that basis, the Russian Government have agreed to it being an exception to the anti-ballistic missile treaty between themselves and the United States of America.

An anxiety that prejudiced opinion against missile defence proposals in Britain and the rest of Europe was that missile defences would apply only to north America. Even though Fylingdales radar station in Yorkshire would be essential to US missile defence, it was thought that the UK would not be under the umbrella and would be vulnerable to whatever attack the US feared. The United States Government have since made it clear that they envisage any missile defence system extending to NATO, Europe and, potentially, to Russia. Thus those anxieties are overcome.

The outstanding question now is what diplomatic and technological conditions are required to achieve the various benefits of missile defence in practice. Diplomatically, there must be agreement from the beginning that protection will be given to north America, Europe and Russia. Any scheme designed solely to protect north America would divide and possibly destroy the NATO alliance. Unless Russia is included, there would be no incentive for Russia to negotiate strategic arms reductions below currently agreed levels, and the stability of Russian democracy and European security could be threatened.

The second diplomatic requirement is a willingness to extend the protective umbrella to any state that has signed and adhered to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

China is a special case. With an estimated 20 or so ballistic missiles available soon, China has a credible deterrent against attack by either the USA or Russia which would be eliminated by the missile defence system envisaged. There would therefore be an incentive for China to continue building nuclear missiles until it was sure that it could break through missile defences. The whole of Asia would then be under threat from China, and Asian countries would be induced to retain or acquire nuclear weapons. A way of recognising China's strategic interests would be to offer it the protection of the anti-missile umbrella on condition that it did not expand its nuclear arsenal further and on the understanding that it would join strategic arms reduction talks between Russia and America at the same time as Britain and France.

The ultimate obstacle to the missile defence concept could be the difficulty and expense of developing reliable technology. Some commentators have pronounced the proposed scheme to be technologically impossible to achieve. No doubt they draw some of that certainty from the abandonment of star wars because the technology proved too difficult to develop. But that

system, which aimed to intercept several thousand missiles at once faultlessly, had an infinitely more complex task than intercepting 100 or fewer. Some of the technology, such as sensors, radars, computing, communications, is not new. Some research and development is needed, but given clear objectives for the development programme, experts, such as the RAND Corporation, who have assessed what is needed, do not see the technology as out of reach.

The important question is how development and production will be organised. If the whole missile defence system were to fall under the technological hegemony of the USA, then the strategic concept would most likely be rejected by European countries and Russia on that ground alone. Co-development and co-production by NATO countries and Russia, under American leadership, must spread the technological and economic benefits equitably and, at the same time, build confidence. Negotiated co-operation in design, development and production will be as essential to the success of the project as co-operation in deployment.

I urge the Government to persuade the United States Government of a strategic role and purpose of missile defence similar to the role that I have attempted to outline; to persuade other NATO allies of that role and purpose and to engage their active commitment to the project; and to join the United States in establishing arrangements by which NATO allies and Russia may co-operate in designing, developing and producing the required technology. The British Government have a pivotal role to play in achieving all that, which I hope will become a new dimension of United Kingdom foreign and defence policy. If we can achieve a missile defence system on those terms, it will be an infinitely more precious legacy for future generations than a world littered with nuclear missiles that might be used at any time.

4.20 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): As I drew my remarks together for today's debate, I realised with some horror that it was 21 years last month since I joined the services. A number of issues of huge strategic importance face the defence world today, including the reform and future structure of NATO and the whole question of defence procurement. However, I shall look at the immediate threat that we face, the way that it has evolved and the possible responses to meet it.

In 1981, when I joined the Army, and for much of the following 10 years, defence policy was governed by the threat of a Soviet onslaught on the central front. As adjutant of a tank regiment in 1989, I overflew the positions that our tanks would occupy during a Soviet invasion. Against this certain backdrop, other conflicts occurred, generally as a result of the decolonisation of European empires at the end of the second world war. Very occasionally, the two superpowers came close to collision. The Berlin blockade in 1948, the Korean war, the Cuban missile crisis and the Vietnam war are a few examples, but British defence policy remained governed largely by the certainties of the cold war.

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 changed all that The hoped-for peace dividend failed to materialise and the new world order, stripped of the framework provided by the cold war, rapidly became a much more dangerous place. Sir Anthony Parsons, our ambassador at the UN, put it brilliantly when he described the transition as one

"from Cold War to hot peace".

Great Britain and the west struggled to contain the fallout from the decolonisation of the Soviet Union, particularly in areas that the Russians refer to as the near abroad—those independent states that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia and other parts of the world where nationalism took a hold. An analysis of this period reveals the origins of many of the problems that we face today. For the first time, the UN perceived the need to become more dominant, proactive and responsive. The United States, the one remaining superpower, began for the first time to examine whether it should go it alone, whether it should act as the world's policeman or whether it should react only when its own territorial integrity was threatened. We saw the first challenges to that previously most sacred of cows: the integrity of states within their existing frontiers. As a consequence of that and developments in the world of media and communications, a number of shadowy organisations looked beyond and across their own borders for the first time. We also saw the first signs of the doctrine of pre-emptive action, which was first trailed in the form we understand it today in the UN agenda for peace in 1993. Questions of command and control of forces in the field allied to other countries and of course money also began to rear their heads.

Although many of the defence issues that we face today had their origins then, the events of 11 September probably mark the start of a third post-war defence era in which shadowy terrorist movements and rogue states pose asymmetric threats to established democracies. If that were not complicated enough, it has also become clear that this new threat is itself changing and evolving. The horrific events in Bali this week have shown how the threat posed by al-Qaeda and its associates has itself evolved since 11 September and the war in Afghanistan.

How are we to combat this new threat? The first unpalatable truth must be that we have to increase defence spending. I was much taken by a quote from Major-General Fulton published in the October edition of the *RUSI Journal*, which said:

"The question becomes what do we not need to do as a result of 11 September, operations in Afghanistan and the publication of the new chapter, the answer is that we have not found it yet."

The United States has recognised this and increased defence spending by 14 per cent. However, before 11 September there were signs that the United States may eventually turn inwards and that will surely place a larger burden on Europe. As has already been said, the European rapid reaction force has identified 150 basic defence capabilities, but estimates are that 40 of those will be outstanding by the end of next year. Our own Prime Minister has very proper ambitions for Africa that will inevitably involve troops and more money. Increasingly we as a nation are starting to deploy troops not because our vital interests are threatened, but because we choose to do so, as we did in East Timor and Sierra Leone. There is also the question of credibility. We all agree that the threat from international terrorists and weapons of mass destruction is very real. If we are serious about confronting it, it will surely cost money.

[Hugh Robertson]

We need to face the fact that one of our most crucial weapons in the war against terrorism will be intelligence. We in Britain first learned that lesson in the 1950s and 1960s in places such as Malaysia and Kenya, but it is truer now than ever. In the age of modern communication, the means of gathering and collating intelligence have changed beyond recognition and it is vital that our security services are fully funded and properly integrated with those of our allies. The development of our armed forces to meet the new threat will also place a heavy burden on the equipment budget. I do not propose to list all the areas where we need new equipment, but just to name a few. They include the C4ISTAR, the new deep strike capabilities, strategic air transport and, crucially, an integrated land-based air defence system for the UK homeland.

Clearly, to meet this new threat, the scope of defence policy needs to widen. Responses will no longer be exclusively military, but also political, diplomatic, humanitarian, economic, financial and legal. Legality is crucial. Everyone in the Chamber would surely agree that the UK Government must always operate within the remit of international law, despite the fact that our enemies almost certainly never will do. That clearly points to an even greater role for the UN. Its resolutions confer international legitimacy. The UN may not be perfect, but in this new era it is all that we have got.

We also need to develop our home defence plans. The threat from asymmetric attack is clear and we need to develop effective responses that integrate local government, health authorities, emergency services and the Territorial Army. However, throughout all this we must not forget the importance of conventional warfare. It remains the case that forces trained for high-intensity conflict can always adapt to low intensity, but never vice versa. Conventional warfare also arises very rapidly as we have seen recently in the Gulf and may possibly see in Iraq.

It would be wrong not to touch briefly on Iraq and I wholly support the Government's stance. They were right to support the US Administration at this early stage, not only to influence policy, but to create a believable threat of force in order to apply the maximum strategic coercion on the regime in Baghdad. I certainly agree that the correct channel is the UN, as it will confer international legitimacy on the operation. The resolutions on Iraq must be robust and enforceable, but if the UN handles the issue correctly, it will do its reputation a power of good and, in this new uncertain era, send a powerful message about the standards expected of organisations and states in the modern world.

I said earlier that I entirely supported the Government's stance on international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, but they must make clear the linkage between the two issues. I fully appreciate the need to protect scarce intelligence resources. Of course, none of us has access to that information. The Government must believe that if Saddam Hussein is allowed to develop weapons of mass destruction he will either use them himself or give them to terrorist organisations to use against us and that link needs to be made clearer.

I conclude with a few words about our service men and women. I have highlighted the enormous changes in the defence world in the 21 years since I joined and something of the threat that we currently face. One thing that has certainly not changed is the quality and commitment of the young men and women who serve in our armed forces. Our thoughts should always be with them and their families who give them so much support. After all, we will look to them first in the difficult and uncertain days ahead.

4.30 pm

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): A recent Ministry of Defence report revealed that the countries of the [redacted] now spend $772 billion on their so-called defences—or, more accurately, on preparing for war. The United States spends $400 billion of that on its war machine, and the United Kingdom spends £24 billion, the equivalent of $36 billion, for the same purpose.

One would have thought that, now that there are enough weapons to destroy the world many times over, the nations of the world would call a halt to such expenditure, but they have not done so. Indeed, the United States has announced that it will spend a further $30 billion a year. Do the people of that country, or its Government, feel that they are any safer in the knowledge that they can inflict even more destruction on this beautiful planet of ours?

Not to be outsmarted—if not outgunned—the United Kingdom has also decided to increase its so-called defence expenditure, by £3.5 billion by 2005–06. Not so long ago, the Prime Minister rightly reminded us that Africa is a

"scar on the conscience of the world".

It will continue to be a scar as long as we continue to prioritise investment in weapons of war rather than investment in people.

Is it not ironic, or indeed obscene, that the Government can find money to increase the war machine massively, but cannot find money—or are unwilling to provide it—to compensate the victims of atomic tests in the Pacific in the 1950s? A letter sent to MPs by Ian Anderson, an American attorney at law acting on behalf of the American atomic veterans, said

"The UK's policy of denial surely cannot continue indefinitely ... the Queen has paradoxically approved of medals honouring the New Zealand servicemen who served at the Christmas Island nuclear tests with UK servicemen, yet no such recognition is accorded to her own troops."

That cannot be right.

The New Zealand and Fiji Governments have now recognised that compensation and, indeed, proper pensions are necessary for those who suffered radiation exposure during the tests. The US Government's department of veterans' affairs has announced that it will recognise five more cancers as attributable to exposures to atmospheric radiation for pension payment purposes. That brings the number of cancers recognised by the US Government as attributable to nuclear test radiation to 21. Why, on this occasion, are we not standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States in responding positively to what was a great tragedy?

I believe that we should do that, and I assumed that we would, because back in 1990 the present Prime Minister supported a private Member's Bill demanding

compensation for the victims of the atomic tests. We now know from evidence produced in the past few weeks that the people affected—destroyed—by those tests were not just the soldiers involved but their children and grandchildren. Obviously they need compensation, as do those suffering from Gulf war syndrome.

I was brought up to believe that socialism was the language of priorities, but in this instance it seems that the Government are working on the basis of a different definition. They prioritise expenditure on developing weapons of mass destruction or war, yet cannot find a tiny proportion of that money to compensate victims of the creation of those weapons, or indeed victims of participation in wars.

Over the weekend, I had the privilege of addressing a national demonstration in Plymouth by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament against Trident and the refitting of that weapon at Devonport. We know that Trident has cost successive Governments some £15 billion. We also know that its annual operating costs are now some £280 million a year. We handed a petition to the Ministry of Defence protesting against Trident and its refit, and as we did so we thought of the many better ways of spending the money. It could be spent on health, education, better homes or responding to the tragedy of countries such as Africa.

The real cost, however, is not just financial; it also relates to all the skills, talents and creativity of the work force employed to produce Trident. My thoughts drifted from the financial cost to the cost in terms of the loss of skills that could be better used in the production of socially useful goods and services if we are to begin to plan for a world at peace rather than a world preparing for war—a world in which we really do begin to turn swords into ploughshares.

Yet the ultimate cost of weapons of mass destruction such as Trident consists not merely of the money spent and the skills wasted, but of the death and destruction that will follow its use. Is it not ironic that if Trident were ever used it would destroy not just the skills but the lives of the people who produced that weapon of war? I do not think that that is the reward that they would expect for their labours.

We are led to believe that President Bush and our Prime Minister are so opposed to weapons of mass destruction that they are willing to go to war with Iraq on the issue. Can the Minister explain this to me? If those Governments are so opposed to weapons of mass destruction, how can the United States maintain thousands upon thousands of nuclear warheads? Perhaps the Minister will also explain how the United Kingdom can maintain its vast nuclear arsenal. The Government should justify the number of nuclear warheads that they deploy and clarify the circumstances in which they might be used, because they have said that they are willing to use them.

Is it not an act of hypocrisy for us to oppose the possession by others of weapons of mass destruction, while justifying our possession of such weapons? Perhaps we do so because our weapons of mass destruction are nice, while those supposedly used by Saddam Hussein are nasty. Is it also true that the weapons that the west has sold to countries such as Iraq, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and India, to name but a few, are friendly weapons of mass destruction? If so, how is it that they are friendly weapons when the west sells them to such countries as Iraq, but become so nasty that we are willing to go to war over them when those countries threaten us with them or use them against us—or even when we believe that they possess the weapons?

While we are on the subject of Iraq, the House should not forget that this country is legally committed to nuclear disarmament under article 6 of the 1970 treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, most recently re-endorsed two years ago. If we expect Iraq to submit to its international obligations to get rid of its weapons of mass destruction, we should also respect our obligations to do so. As for the United States, it still refuses to ratify the chemical weapons convention or the comprehensive test ban treaty, to approve the creation of the International Criminal Court or to abide by the non-proliferation treaty. When it makes a gesture to abide by that treaty and reduce its nuclear arsenal, it invariably relates to weapons that are redundant. It then proceeds to replace those weapons with weapons that are more deadly and sophisticated.

It is acceptable for the west to sell weapons to other countries, no matter how evil their regimes. Those countries can then use them to gas their own people, as Saddam Hussein gassed the Kurds, without the smallest of protests from the west. No matter how great the suffering, the Government tell us that arms sales are good for our economy. I invite the Minister to read the recent publication by the Campaign Against the Arms Trade called, "The Employment Consequences of a Ban on Arms Exports". It demonstrates that at present only 0.3 per cent. of total United Kingdom employment is dependent on military equipment exports. Military equipment investment is capital, not labour, intensive. As always, the only people who gain are the arms manufacturers and dealers, and that has been true throughout our history.

Sadly, arms sales are also a corruption of democracy. That is clearly shown in a recent written reply by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) published last month, in which he stated:

> "Information held by the United Kingdom Government on companies and individuals involved in the export of military supplies is commercial in confidence and is withheld under Sections 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information."—[*Official Report*, 19 September 2002; Vol.390, c. 312W.]

Can the Minister justify this secrecy?

I shall conclude with something that, with a little help from Ministers, may have a positive outcome. We all know that 16 years ago Mordechai Vanunu was put in an Israeli jail. He has been rotting there and for 11 of those years in solitary confinement. On 29 October he comes up for parole. I want the Government to make all efforts to back this application from a brave man. It will not cost as much as two aircraft carriers or 150 state-of-the-art strike aircraft, but it would be worth so much more.

4.42 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I do not know whether you have noticed from the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the shorter your limits on Back

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

Bench speeches, the more prolix those on the Front Bench seem to become. We were regaled with a wonderful example of the benefits of brevity by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson), who demonstrated in an extremely thoughtful speech some of the challenges that face our armed forces and society in the global war against terrorism. He covered most of the points and I shall try to fill in some of the gaps.

We have all learned from the Bali experience perhaps more than any other, although we learned it to some degree from the horrendous events of 11 September in the United States, that this is genuinely a global war. We are all in it together. I know that some of my constituents are mourning at this very moment, and that will be replicated throughout the House. It is incumbent on us to ensure that the policies we promote will eradicate the tremendous evils of terrorism. There can be no compromise with terrorism.

The methods we use have to span a wide spectrum, including intelligence, police procedures, the justice system, the ending of money laundering and the evolution of military assets and tactics to match. On the judicial question, I am shocked that it would appear that some countries in Europe may not be willing to extradite terrorist suspects to the United States of America on the grounds that if they are found guilty of the charges that could be preferred against them, they would be subject to the US death penalty. We in the free world must all co-operate wholeheartedly. There can be no such inhibitions to our co-operation.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), who spoke at length and wisely, brought to our attention, as did the Leader of the Opposition at Question Time, the matter of proscribing Jemaah Islamiyah under the terms of the Terrorist Act 2000. The case is not unique. I have had cause to bring to the attention of the House the situation in Colombia. Our armed forces, the special air service regiment, to a small but significant extent has given advice to the armed forces of Colombia who are fighting a desperately important war against a vicious guerrilla movement, FARC, and to some degree the ELN. There have been more casualties in the conflict there than ever have been caused to date by al-Qaeda. FARC is using the drugs trade to finance its operations and to acquire its weaponry. Yet our Government do not proscribe FARC, and nor does the European Union. Nor, to my knowledge, do they proscribe any Latin American terrorist organisation, apart from the self-defence groups in Colombia. Those groups would not operate if the terrorists who are threatening democracy and the rule of law were made inoperative. It is important that we show a united front—we and our European Union colleagues, who are just as bad as we are in this matter. FARC, ELN, in Peru the Sendero Luminoso and in Chile the Frente Manuel Rodriguez should all be proscribed organisations, as should Jemaah Islamiyah.

I must refer the House to certain aspects of European policy vis-à-vis Iraq and the implications of the divisions to which my hon. Friend alluded: the divisions that exist within what should be a wholly united coalition of western democracies. The United Kingdom says, "Yes, we are prepared to take military action against Iraq". There is not too much conditionality in our response. The Federal Republic of Germany appears to say, "No, in no circumstance whatever are we prepared to undertake military operations against Iraq". The French position is more nuanced as they are hoping for a United Nations resolution, or in their case resolutions, which will have widespread support and which they can back. If a European security and defence policy is to have any import, any meaning, and if the European members of our alliance have such disparate positions over such a crucial issue as the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, what future is there for the more complex situations in the Balkans, the near east and elsewhere? We have to work on concerting our position.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wilkinson: I will not because time is short.

In this regard I am concerned by the duality of responsibility between the European Union's so-called High Representative, the former Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solana, and the External Affairs Commissioner. The Front-Bench spokesman rightly reminded us of the dangers that can exist to the effectiveness of our response in a crisis, if the respective staffs of the European Union and of NATO come up with different views and options. That could confuse what is already probably a difficult situation to respond to. If there are to be differences of opinion between the External Affairs Commissioner and the High Representative, it bodes doubly ill. If the European Union is to pursue this path, I urge that it must do so under the stewardship of the High Representative because at least he will be answerable to the Council, and it is the Council who are the representatives of national Governments, and the national Governments who are providing the armed forces and making the decisions about any European military response.

ESDP must have a responsibility to combat terrorism—something that has not been spelled out in the Petersberg tasks. I spelled it out in my report to the Assembly of the Western European Union on the military means to combat terrorism, which was passed by the Assembly in June. I earnestly hope that if ESDP is to be significant, this nettle will be grasped. Par excellence, if the ESDP is about peacemaking, those who are in the business of brutal murder and imposing their will by terrorist methods should be enemy number one.

We—the national parliamentarians who vote the funds and supply the Defence Ministers who have to make the decisions—should provide the scrutiny of ESDP. This has been discussed in the convention and my earnest hope is that because of the crucial link that we represent between the people whose taxes provide the resources that we allocate to defence, we will have the duty of scrutiny. In so doing, we should take the crucial decisions about mobility and, for example, the tankers that we need, as well as the A330/200, and other decisions in relation to the ability to project power and to be more flexible and effective.

In conclusion, I repeat the wise words of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent, who said that the quality of our armed forces in these

enterprises is crucial. I ask the Government to come to the House and say why, at Deepcut, there seems to be a fundamental breakdown in discipline. Officers' heads should roll and there should not be such a succession of scandals and suicides. It indicates to me that something is fundamentally wrong. Elsewhere our armed forces do us credit. This episode does not.

4.52 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In June, a group of scientists from America packed a container with uranium, loaded it on a train in Austria and sent it through Turkey and across the sea to America. They landed it on the American coast, and it is now lodged in the heart of New York. They did that to make the point that although the container went through border controls and tests—it was active uranium, so it should have been detected—no one detected it.

We should ask what is the greatest risk. There is no safe course ahead, but we must find the least perilous course. We all felt a chill of fear when we saw the pictures of the chemical weapons protection suit that has now been issued to frontline health service workers and when we heard that they have had smallpox injections.

One of my worst experiences during my 15 years as a Member of Parliament was when someone from the city of Newport came back from the Gulf war in a body bag. As a supporter of the Gulf war and of all the other military actions taken by the present and previous Governments, I find myself deeply unhappy with the present proposals because we are taking the wrong course.

What frightens me, as I am sure it frightens everyone, is the terrible nature of biological weapons, which make no distinction between warrior and civilian, young and old, Christian or Muslim. There could be terrible destruction, with diseases that have been dormant since medieval times being unleashed. We know that Saddam Hussein has biological and chemical weapons, but what is the risk? I believe that the greatest or only risk—the only conceivable situation in which he is likely to use the weapons—will arise if there is a military invasion of his country. We have heard today that he is a wicked, evil man. He is indeed, but he is not a suicidal maniac.

Every time that Saddam Hussein has attacked a group of people, he has done so in the certainty in his own mind that he was going to win. When he attacked the Kurds in Halabjah, he knew that the rest of the world was not interested and would not help them. When he attacked Iran, he was again certain that the Ayatollah was a weak leader whose country was in chaos, and he was sure that he would have an easy victory. He attacked Kuwait in the belief that the American ambassador had given him an assurance that the Americans would not intervene. Under what circumstances would this man, the great survivor, attack another state? Under what circumstances would he use his weapons of mass destruction?

I do not know of any plausible scenario except one, and it is the one that we are walking straight into. If he is defeated and is in one of his palaces, like Hitler in the Berlin bunker, he might use his biological weapons—not by using his ramshackle missiles, which are useless and cannot be sent far, but by doing a deal with his ideological antithesis, al-Qaeda. In those circumstances, he might well do that, and the horror that we all dread might take place.

The change in the world situation resulted not from what happened on 11 September but from the election of George W. Bush. We should examine the right-wing fundamentalists who are now in government in America and their plans for a new American century, which were drawn up before they took office. They are now fulfilling those plans, which did not start last September. They started when Bush was elected, with a rogue state creation programme.

When Bush took office, the situation between North and South Korea was one of rapprochement. It was going very well, but George W. Bush immediately cancelled a meeting that had been arranged by Madeleine Albright. He tried to turn that rapprochement into antagonism. A mythology was spread about the danger of missiles from North Korea hitting Seattle, when the North Koreans had great difficulty in targeting its missiles on South Korea. He made sure that the situation deteriorated.

The position in respect of Iran was an improving one over many years. There were visits from representatives from western countries, but President Bush has made sure that the situation has grown far worse. With Iraq, there was stability for almost 10 years. Iraq had been contained by the bombing programme, which I fully supported. The inspectors left because they were fed up; they believed that they were close to finding significant weapons, but left because they believed that there was going to be bombing of the sites that they could not inspect. There might have been some justification for action then, but there is no justification now.

The plans from PNAC—the project for the new American century—make alarming reading. They were drawn up not last year, but in 2000. One of them speaks of the American armed forces as

"the cavalry on the new American frontier."

The blueprint supports a document written by Wolfowitz and Cheney—Pearl and Rumsfeld are also involved—that says that the US must

"discourage advanced industrial nations from challenging our leadership or even aspiring to a larger regional or global role."

They talk of regime change not only in Iraq but in Syria and Iran. However, their greatest target is China, which they see as the next state that might challenge them as a new world power.

In an extraordinary speech, the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) suggested that we could become a vassal state of America by abandoning a dearly cherished policy of this country, and of almost all Council of Europe countries—our opposition to capital punishment. Suddenly, we should accept that.

The Americans have said that they regard the United Kingdom as

"the most effective and efficient means of exercising American global leadership."

That was and is Bush's policy. He has used the dreadful events of 11 September to accelerate that policy. Most people have forgotten the events that occurred before then.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood made an interesting point, although we would take his expert views on South America a little more seriously if he had

[Paul Flynn]

not been an apologist for certain aspects of Pinochet's actions. The hon. Gentleman referred to Colombia. The United States' attempt to impose its failed policies of drug prohibition on a vassal state had dreadful results, leading to continuous chaos and at least three armies, two of which were funded by drugs. What if we apply that policy to Afghanistan? We went in because the Taliban were protecting al-Qaeda. That was a justified objective, and it was successful up to a point. However, another objective was to eliminate the drugs trade from Afghanistan. At the time, as the United Nations has reported, the Taliban had reduced by 92 per cent. the growth of poppies in their areas, whereas the Northern Alliance had increased by 300 per cent. the growth of poppies in their areas.

Our victory in Afghanistan, if that is what it was, did not decrease the use of drugs and the growth of the drug trade, but if we had gone in with the same policy as the Americans pursued towards Colombia, the drug trade would have expanded in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and the country formerly known as Burma, now Myanmar. The worry is that by following the policies of the United States we will see the Colombia-isation of a whole area of mid-Asia.

I have another concern that is discussed only rarely. We have heard of star wars, but other weapons are being planned and may exist. A very interesting one is HAARP—the high frequency active auroral research programme. The Americans view it as having innocent intentions, but it terrifies the Soviet Union and many other countries because its effect has been described as boiling the ionosphere. Terrible weapons might exist beyond the ones of which we are aware.

It is significant that the document on the project for a new American century refers to combat likely to take place in new dimensions, in space, cyberspace, and perhaps the world of microbes. It says that advanced forms of biological warfare that can target specific genotypes may transform biological warfare from the realm of terror to a politically useful tool. The people who wrote that and believe that it is the future are in charge of the only superpower in the world. It is a tragedy that we have not taken a more critical stance and challenged them in the way that leaders of other European countries have done.

Finally, I thought that the best speech that I have read, possibly in my life time, on how to deal with the world, how to deal with the third world and how to guarantee peace was made by the Prime Minister at last year's Labour party conference. I urge him to take some time off to read his own words. We should take the least dangerous course, not the most dangerous one.

5.4 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): In listening to the debate, what first comes to mind is that we live in a more dangerous world than ever before. The weakened grip of the old Soviet bloc has unleashed a multitude of regional power struggles, with dictatorships and nascent democracies fighting for influence and recognition within their own continents or, as in the case of Islamic extremism, against anyone who speaks in favour of secularism, liberty and democratic values.

Instead of rogue states spending less money on arms, more money than ever is being spent on more powerful weapons, and nuclear proliferation is now a reality of regional power building. Sanctions, for the main part, have had a laughable effect, except of course on the civilian populations of the countries concerned. Be it diamonds in Africa or oil in the middle east, these reserves are not like bank accounts, which can be frozen. Even if Saddam were to allow in the inspectors, his access to 10 per cent. of the world's oil reserves means that he can afford whatever weapons he wants, whenever he wants. Last year, for instance, it is estimated that he earned some $2 billion from oil, despite sanctions and a bad oil market. In this regard, I note how the Government always seem ever so wary of mentioning oil when discussing the possibility of war against Iraq. That, in my view, is wrong, as the effect on world trade of organised market manipulation or embargoes is clearly a significant matter of national interest.

Some people argue that a kind of post-cold war international vacuum has been created, thus undermining the now central role of the United States. Others more blatantly accuse the United States of warmongering or of getting involved only when it suits them and even isolationism. Such arguments are deeply flawed and very dangerous.

What is the ultimate weapon of defence? It is certainly not nuclear weapons or anything to do with the military. It is the growing understanding within most of the developing world of the value of individual liberty, democracy, free enterprise and the liberalisation of domestic and world trade. This message has not been lost on America's enemies, many of whom predicted that the terrible events of 11 September would lead to increased US isolationism and even the end of the world globalisation process. How wrong they have been. The process has been accelerated rather than slowed. In the face of the common terrorist defence threat, developing countries and western countries are seeing more than ever how their common defence interest lies in the development of trading relationships between them and the resulting higher living standards for their peoples. The best example of that was the agreement to move ahead on the World Trade Organisation trade round at Doha, which, prior to 11 September, was on the verge of collapse. However, within two months of 11 September, it suddenly happened because it made people think about the problem.

I mention trade because it is key to understanding the reasons behind the new worldwide, American-led resolve to counter terrorism and to deal with national defence in the new global context. States that were once blacklisted by the United States, such as India and Pakistan, are now back at the table. Relations with China are improving. It is no coincidence that, only a few months ago, China joined the World Trade Organisation and now waits to expand its commercial base.

Diplomatic ties between Russia and the west are increasingly strong, with exchanges of security information and a co-ordinated, albeit different, approach forming. Once again, trade is playing its part in that. Russia, with its significant investments in Iraq, has every interest in retaining interest and dialogue with the United States in preparation for the possibility of a post-Saddam Iraq.

The United Kingdom can also see how, working closely with the United States, we can have an influence—for example, in encouraging the US to work with the United Nations, or having a continued involvement in the post-war reconstruction in Afghanistan.

The message is that by standing together we will defeat common threats to world security—that is the message of 11 September and, indeed, of Kuta beach. That has been the basis of our recent successes in putting Saddam Hussein on to his back foot and of NATO's successes in recent decades. Standing together without the ability and ultimate intent of using force will lead to failure. Let us suppose that we took NATO or the United States out of the picture. Consider the prospect of Europe acting alone, with France soft-pedalling on the one hand, and Germany hostile to a firm answer to Saddam on the other. Where would we be now? I would say, "Not very far". How quiet the Government have been recently on the Nice treaty's European security and defence policy—a toothless dead duck of a proposal if I ever heard one. The lesson is clear: we stick with NATO, we do not cut out our allies, such as Turkey, and we do not alienate the United States.

It is refreshing that the Government have stopped talking about a peace dividend—of course, there never was one. Now, we should stop wasting our time on European Union defence and going it alone, with its inherent risk of splitting NATO, we should stop running down our regular forces, stop decimating our reserve forces and put more money into our military so that they can cope with their ever-growing number of operations.

In that regard, November's Prague NATO summit will be very important—not only in terms of the enlargement of NATO and the related reorganisation that that involves, but in providing us with the opportunity to disown the disastrous European defence experiment and to reaffirm our support for NATO and US involvement.

In fairness, the Government talk of supporting NATO, but can they deliver, given the way in which we are heading? While Europe is spending its time fretting about from whom its ever-smaller forces will take orders, America has been spending money on its defence. The problem is that, since 11 September alone, America has spent $48 billion more than Europe, Russia and China combined on its defence. Some people complain about the US unilateralist approach. Indeed, they say that the US has been unwilling to work within NATO in relation to Afghanistan or Iraq. The fact remains, however, that Europe's forces are now so weakened that US unilateralism is becoming increasingly inevitable, even if we say that we are going to support the US with men or indeed just with words.

To that extent, America is fully justified in saying that Europe should be paying more for its own defence—not only to up our game in absolute terms, but even if just to support a keyhole-surgery type approach of targeted rapid reaction and mobility. Let us not forget that the more that we rely on specialist forces, the more that technology comes into play. Here more than anywhere US research investment means that the US is pulling away from us so quickly that arms compatibility within NATO is becoming an ever more serious issue.

On equipment, the Government seem concerned about maintaining competition within the arms industry. Some people believe that Europe should jealously guard its manufacturing capability. That may sound attractive, but frankly we have missed the boat, as Europe's historic unwillingness to invest in research now means that we have a great and ever growing reliance on US technology. Why waste time fighting the inevitability of market consolidation? We should actually be prioritising European and US arms compatibility—that is, if we are going to have any sort of industry in Europe at all in future.

The Government also need to be more upfront on the realities of our and Europe's weakening position. Why, for instance, have they been sitting on the fence with regard to America's national missile defence proposals? Earlier today the Secretary of State moved towards a positive position on the issue, but not quite. Surely it is in our best interests that America feels safe from attack. Why not help it to feel safe in a way that would enable us to receive the benefit of the missile shield against nuclear proliferation? Given our overall relationship with America, surely it is highly unlikely that a missile threat against America would not also pose a threat to us.

Effective defence measures do not begin and end with star wars projects. Indeed, our civil defence capability is widely seen as inadequate and underfunded. How many terror incidents must there be before we sort out our civil defence?

Finally, the Government need to appreciate that if we are to maintain our severely stretched operational capability and improve the technical capability of our military, we will simply have to increase spending on our armed forces.

5.14 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): President Bush said last week that the

"campaign against Saddam Hussein is not a distraction from the fight to destroy the al-Qaeda movement."

That is clearly a political statement, and I believe that it is fundamentally flawed. Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda are not the same; even if there is sometimes similarity in means, there most certainly is not in nature.

This issue arose as a major point in today's debate, and the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman made much of the argument that Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda are the same. However, those who say that there is a difference are not a small minority—whether in this House, in the country at large, or internationally. Last week, the Democrats in the United States Congress voted by a clear majority against the proposal to allow President Bush to do what he wanted in relation to any form of terrorism. It would be tragic and awkward for the Labour party if we were to be nearer to President Bush's position than that of the Democrats and many people in this country and the United States.

I regularly read American opinion polls, which show fluctuations in the level of support for action against Iraq. The message that is coming through is that the public do see a distinction. They sometimes forget about it, as a poll this week indicated. People were appalled at the aftermath of what happened in Bali, but when they begin to think, they see a clear distinction between what Saddam Hussein is—the threat and the theatre—and

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

what the international terrorist is. Political error will generate error in military policies as well—in this country and in the United States. Once that began to show up in any conflict, the public opinion that supported dealing with the two theatres as one would melt away. Leaders in this country, the United States or elsewhere who argued that position would be seriously isolated from international public opinion.

The global terrorist is a relatively new phenomenon. In the past, there have been national terrorists and even international terrorists, as has already been alluded to, but the global terrorist is a reflection of the politically and economically global society that we now live in. The global terrorist is well informed, well trained, well equipped, determined, works under the cover of urban or rural society, and is often prepared to give his life. It might be cowardly to coerce a young militant into giving his life, but it is fanatical and brave and the ultimate sacrifice to be that young militant and to give one's life. My fear is that, by dealing with the two threats as one and further isolating the young Muslim international community from the rest of the world, we will create a breeding ground for more fanatics and more young men who are prepared to be brave and threaten democracy in a much wider forum.

Defending democracy and maintaining a stable society needs a completely different approach from that used in the cold war and post-cold war eras to deal with a conventional threat. We might as well recognise that now in our foreign policy and defence policy, and in the way we allocate public expenditure. If we do not do so, we will be back here again after further atrocities and a further failure to deal with the global terrorist. We will then have to commit ever-increasing resources to deal with an ever-growing situation.

To counter the global terrorist, we primarily need better intelligence. We need a dramatic increase in the existing intelligence provided by the various intelligence agencies, and perhaps we should bring such agencies together in a more co-ordinated way. I give credit to the Government for increasing expenditure on intelligence services. However, £15 million extra out of a combined Foreign Office and defence budget of about £24 billion will be shown to be inadequate. Some members of the Government will probably feel that too, and those who do must fight for better resources for that capacity and for a reallocation of existing resources.

Of course, we also need political association and political understanding, without which there is no point in having more intelligence. We will never be prepared to exchange 100 per cent. of our intelligence information—and we never should—but we need to be prepared to exchange intelligence to tackle a situation, whether in Indonesia, Afghanistan or wherever. We will not be able to share that intelligence, however, unless we share more of a common political platform. We must be able to have a relationship with the moderate states in the middle east, in the far east and in the area around Malaysia and Indonesia. If we do not have a common political cause, there is no way that our intelligence services will be able to share intelligence to track down the terrorist, who is as much of a threat to those societies as he is to the western societies that we inhabit.

We need a completely different approach to Saddam Hussein. If he is a threat, and if his arms are about to be used, the measures that I would advocate for countering the individual terrorist and the small terrorist group will not work—more conventional forces, including tanks, air power and so on, will be needed, and we must retain that capacity. At the moment, however, I do not believe that Saddam Hussein is as serious a threat as he is made out to be. One might have thought, listening to the Front-Bench spokesmen in the debate that we had on the matter two or three weeks ago, that the Government really had evidence, apart from the dossier, that convinced them that he was a threat. At that time, I began to think that perhaps they had such evidence, as they displayed such determination and unity. I was in the United States last week, however, and one sometimes gets a different picture. The perspective there is different—apart from the situation with the Democrats, to which I have referred—and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency is saying in his advice to Congress, "This guy is not an immediate threat, but he will be a threat if you guys let him believe that you are going to attack him." That is a serious flaw in the doctrine of pre-emptive strike. I believe that any pre-emptive strike would be extreme folly.

I do not know what will happen at the United Nations in the debates that follow. I hope that the debate today with members outside the Security Council is informed, and that it takes the United Nations down a route that will allow the situation in Iraq to be resolved, which means the return of the inspectors. It would be wrong, at this stage, to pre-determine what the United Nations reaction should be if the inspectors fail. Let us give them a chance. When they come back, if they say, "We've been obstructed," or "We've failed," it is incumbent on the United Nations to come forward with a further response. However, to argue—as has been argued by people such as President Bush—that our response should be pre-determined, and that everybody should know that Saddam will be attacked whatever happens, is a completely wrong strategy.

That kind of strategy, combined with a failure to understand the distinction between Saddam Hussein and the international terrorist, will lead many young Muslims worldwide into the hands of those who are prepared to commit atrocities. I do not believe that such people want to commit atrocities; I do not believe that they are any different from us as human beings. I believe that their political system has driven them into a situation in which it becomes honourable, as it was in the crusades, to commit one's life for a cause. That is highly dangerous for the developed world and for the world that wants to be based on democracy. That is why we must counter it.

I wanted to make one or two further comments, but I am mindful that other colleagues also want to speak. I am grateful for having been given the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

5.24 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) said that he thought that there was a new phenomenon of international terrorism. I recall that phenomenon some time ago in the shape of Carlos the Jackal, a rather successful international terrorist, the

Baader-Meinhof gang and the Red Army Faction. I recall something else about all those terrorist groups. It was always denied that anyone else was behind them and it was denied that they were covertly funded, supplied and supported by the enemies of western democracy. Do you know what happened, Madam Deputy Speaker, at the end of the cold war when the wall came down and the secrets were exposed to public view? It turned out that those groups had been funded by the conventional enemies of western democracy and many of them were dug out from their boltholes in the former Soviet Union and the disgustingly named "socialist democratic republics" of its evil empire, which we were so lucky to defeat.

How did we defeat that evil empire? It was by having what the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith), who I was sorry to see leaving the Chamber as soon as he had finished his speech, called the US war machine and the British war machine. The funny thing about machines is that they are as good or as bad as the purposes to which they are put. I think that the nuclear weapons of the US and British war machines have rather a lot to their credit. Post-Hiroshima and post-Nagasaki, in all the time that they existed, they never killed anyone. However, weapons, such as the knives and the machetes that were used in Rwanda, killed a great many people. Therefore, to generalise about weapons without reference to the nature and track record of the people who possess them and to the intentions of the people who might use them is to miss the whole point of the debate.

We have heard some interesting remarks about how brave it is of these young men to sacrifice themselves. I do not think that it is very brave to sacrifice oneself in a cause when one has been indoctrinated with blind hatred and with a belief that, if one sacrifices oneself in the cause, one will go to paradise and have a much better existence after one's death than one has now. Far from being brave, it is the essence of cowardice to demonstrate one's so-called bravery by taking it out not on people who can hit back but on those who are going about their lawful business, whether at work in an office building or at play in a discotheque. With due respect to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, who knows I like him very much as an individual, it is very foolish to say such things in the House of Commons because it encourages people who are misguided at best and downright evil at worst.

I referred to the contribution of the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, but the speech of the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) was a stark contrast. He made one of the most original and thoughtful speeches in the debate when he referred to ballistic missile defence. I believe that I am right to say that he spent much of his working life before he entered Parliament in the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Beard *indicated assent.*

Dr. Lewis: I am glad that I got that right. The work that he did in the Ministry of Defence with many people from many other political parties probably did a great deal more for peace, security and freedom in this country than the blatherings of those who think that getting rid of our weapons, while allowing dictators such as Saddam Hussein to keep or to acquire them, will lead us to a promised land of peaceful international relations.

The Americans' determination to get rid of Saddam Hussein this time has, of course, something to do with 11 September 2001. Even if there were no direct link between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, it would be relevant for the Americans to consider the fact that, when they dealt with al-Qaeda before 11 September, they knew that it was a highly dangerous organisation that might pose a deadly threat at some unspecified time in the future. They did not act against it, probably because they felt that international and domestic opinion was not strong enough to enable them to act against it. We know what happened—3,000 people were killed. I believe that people at the heart of the American planning machine take the view, and they would be right to do so, that they are not going to make the same mistake with Saddam Hussein.

People say that there is no immediate threat from Saddam Hussein, but what is the converse of that proposition? Surely we are not supposed to wait until there is a threat so close to us that it would be much more dangerous to act against him than it is now. If the truth be told, and I say with no sense of undue pride that I mentioned this in debates dealing with the bombing of Iraq two or three years ago—long before the events that we are now considering—the real mistake was made by the Americans and the British Conservative Government in 1991, when they failed to finish off Saddam Hussein. They were concerned that a coalition might break down, leading to adverse consequences in the political set-up of the middle east. Because they ducked that decision then, we now face a harder decision. That was a mistake; we must not make the same mistake now and store up even greater trouble for ourselves in future.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who I am sorry to see is not in his place, asked about the circumstances in which Saddam Hussein might use nuclear weapons. He said that the most likely circumstance is that of an attack on Iraq, when Saddam would have nothing to lose. That over-simplifies matters, because Saddam may have nothing to lose, but the military infrastructure around him will still have a great deal to lose. They will know that if they carry out any order from Saddam Hussein in the course of an overwhelming military attack from a western coalition, which is what it will be if it happens, they will face certain annihilation. The best way to deal with the matter is to deal with the threat before it gets more and more certain that Saddam Hussein will acquire more deadly weapons of mass destruction than he already has and be able to hold the region, if not the world, to ransom.

One of the strange things that Saddam and al-Qaeda have in common is that they were too impatient. Both wanted to act but they did not want to wait. As we now know, if Saddam Hussein had waited two years to invade Kuwait, the scenario would have been very different. If he had waited that long, he would have had a nuclear bomb, so the west's response would have been more cautious and indecisive, and that would have shifted the balance of strategic considerations, possibly decisively, against what still deservedly carries the name of the free world.

Make no bones about it, hon. Members should be aware of the fact that there is no disgrace in referring to the strategic importance of the resources of the middle

[Dr. Lewis]

east; there is no disgrace in referring to the oil-richness of the middle east; and there is no disgrace in recognising that Saddam Hussein wanted to go into Kuwait precisely because he wanted those resources and, above all, to deny them to states that he regards as enemies.

I want to cut short my remarks because I know that other Members wish to speak. I shall conclude with the briefest of references to NATO's upcoming, vital summit in Prague on 21 and 22 November. When that event occurs, there will be an enlargement of NATO. Nobody knows yet how many countries will join; it could be up to six or seven. That enlargement will involve a significant increase in NATO's obligations. If that occurs and it works—I think that it will do so—NATO will once again have triumphed in showing international society that it is possible to work together co-operatively in matters of vital national and international significance without undue loss of individual sovereignty. I think that the Americans put up with the idea of a rapid reaction force outside NATO because they thought that it might help the Europeans to contribute more ships, aircraft and soldiers. That is not going to happen and they know it. Thank goodness they are now setting about creating a real rapid reaction force that is inside the structure of NATO and is not futilely placed outside it so as to confuse, weaken and undermine all that NATO has achieved in years gone by.

5.35 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before posing certain questions of a technical nature of which I have given notice to the Ministry of Defence, may I express a passionate view? A country cannot ask its service men and women to put their lives at risk in circumstances where it is not the overwhelming settled conviction of the country that the cause is legitimate, just and sensible.

Whether I like it or not, I opposed the Falklands war, but I recognise that the overwhelming view of this country was that action should be taken. Yes, I opposed the Gulf war, but I recognise that the overwhelming conviction of the country was that something should be done about the invasion of Kuwait. Yes, I opposed what happened in Kosovo and Afghanistan, and what a mess they are turning out to be. Nevertheless, there was again a very strong feeling that something should be done.

On this occasion, it is far from the settled conviction of Britain that there should be a pre-emptive strike against Iraq without an updated and unmanipulated United Nations decision. Therefore, I agree with the former commander of 7th Armoured Brigade, of which I was once a very junior member, Major General Patrick Cordingley, and many other military people—this is not just the usual suspects—on the very widespread view in this country that we should not take military action without United Nations authority. When one sees all the unaligned countries lining up to express doubt, when President Putin, frankly, puts our Prime Minister in a very humiliating position, and when France and Germany are against such action, we should have no truck with it.

I should like to ask certain questions of a technical nature. Will the Minister state categorically that the WE177 tactical nuclear bombs have not been returned from storage for deployment in the middle east? In that regard, it is not appropriate to use the "neither confirm nor deny" formula. That does not apply to those weapons, as it is this Government who went on the public record to say that they had been withdrawn from service.

I should like also to ask about the weaponry on the British territory of Diego Garcia and particularly the B61-11 tactical nuclear earth-penetrating weapons for destroying bunkers. Again, it is not good enough to give a "neither confirm nor deny" answer. We are heading for a war in which an opponent may, if cornered, use chemical and biological weapons. A potential nuclear response would, first, be the first use since Nagasaki 57 years ago; secondly, break the most important threshold in modern war; thirdly, put Britain at risk of a terrorist response with chemical, nuclear or biological weapons; and, fourthly, make the world a much more dangerous place. In those circumstances, the House of Commons has every right to know exactly what is happening on the British territory of Diego Garcia, which is, incidentally, the biggest American base outside the continental United States.

Finally, and at a little length, I ask Ministers for a response to information from the autumn 2002 issue of "Defence Review" on contamination. There could be a chemical and biological weapon counterattack. In those circumstances, British forces, superbly trained, along with American forces would probably press home their attack and Iraqi troops would surrender. But the UK and US weapons systems might be covered with sarin, soman, ebola or VX, which could spread death for decades. The successor Government to Saddam Hussein, if that were the case, might well refuse to decontaminate them.

We are faced with real problems of noxious agents. Kuwait would certainly refuse to accept them. One would have to dismantle the facilities, or bring them home. Bringing home such equipment would involve very considerable difficulties, so there would have to be sealift. There would be problems for the shipping companies—decontaminating shipping is extremely complex. Few ports would accept contaminated nuclear material or material contaminated by biological agents. Royal Navy ships might well not want to risk, at best, a long time in dry dock, or, at worst, being scrapped after bringing CBW home.

For the sake of time, I shall quote directly from "Defence Review", which states:

> "Even this shipping scenario is based upon a big assumption: that the decontamination at source is judged to be 100 per cent. successful. The difficulty with decontaminating military platforms is that they all have moving parts. While the outside may be clean, agents may have penetrated parts of the vehicle, such as bearings, and be impossible to reach unless the whole vehicle is taken apart and each piece cleaned. Biological agents have a fixed life in the open, but in the dark, warm sheltered parts of some vehicles they could have their life extended exponentially. This raises the question of how clean is clean?
>
> Ministry of Defence vehicles undergo regular routine maintenance and, if the experts are not 100 per cent. sure that they are clean, then all mechanical and electrical engineers will have to be enclosed in full IPE. This imposes a huge physiological and physical burden and makes basic tasks onerous."

That is the kind of difficulty that we will have to face if Saddam Hussein is cornered. What is the Government's response?

We are up against a situation in which there has been a coup in the United States—a very American coup. As some of my colleagues have said, a narrow group of neo-Conservatives around Bush have taken control of US security policy. They are not true representatives of that great country and they are dangerous to us all. We should exercise every caution about following American policy, given the leadership of the United States in 2002.

5.44 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): The issue of global terrorism is clearly at the top of the agenda following the tragedy in Bali, and I associate myself, the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru completely with the condemnation of that attack by right hon. and hon. Members during the debate. As has been pointed out by many, including Vice-President Al Gore, the recent increasing concentration on Iraq should not detract from the challenge posed by terrorism and al-Qaeda. However, I shall focus my comments not on geostrategic or tactical questions posed by the campaign against terrorism or on whether or in what form there should be military intervention in Iraq, but on preparedness for any eventualities.

The Scottish National party position against unilateral military action by the UK and the US is clear and unambiguous, and we hope to see the start of weapons inspections soon. Nevertheless, should it come to pass that our service personnel have to take part in multilateral or unilateral action, I am keen to seek reassurance from the Government on a number of fronts.

The Minister will be aware of my constituency interest in the matter, as many of the current air operations over the middle east and Afghanistan involve personnel from RAF Lossiemouth and RAF Kinloss in Moray. I was pleased to meet many of them in theatre recently while on a visit to bases in the region, together with the hon. Members for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) and for Workington (Tony Cunningham). I put on record my thanks to the RAF and the Ministry of Defence for the excellent tour, which was valuable for learning the views of men and women in the UK armed forces in the region. It is those service people who are at the front line of any potential offensive against Iraq.

Initial reports suggest that any eventual UK military operation in Iraq will also involve an enlarged armoured brigade and air support. Two Scottish regiments—the Scots Dragoon Guards and the Black Watch—are currently assigned to the Desert Rats and they could play a part in any deployment. In addition, Scottish-based Tornado and Nimrod squadrons are expected to be involved.

For that reason, there is a particular interest in Scotland about how those service personnel, either recruited or stationed north of the border, are likely to participate in any eventual action, and whether worries about equipment and Gulf war syndrome have been fully addressed. Bearing in mind the experience of the UK's Operation Granby as part of Desert Storm in the last Gulf war, there are still serious concerns about Gulf war syndrome and how those afflicted have been treated since the conflict.

Can the Minister confirm whether the same mixture of vaccines used to inoculate our troops the last time is likely to be used in the future, and what monitoring procedures are in place for theatre operations to detect emerging symptoms similar to those suffered the last time that troops were involved in offensive action? Those are concerns that have been articulated to me and other Members by service personnel, and they deserve an answer.

Military sources also show that the UK is likely to be asked to produce a force at divisional strength of around 25,000 men. Ministers will be well aware of the problems highlighted by the National Audit Office about the most recent military exercises in Oman. Operation Saif Sareea II highlighted how essential military equipment failed to deal with the extremes of desert warfare. Soldiers' boots fell apart and armoured vehicles, guns, helicopters and heavy lifting equipment could not deal with the heat.

UK armoured regiments will use the same Challenger tanks that were used in Oman, despite the discovery that that desert dust clogged up the tanks' air filter so that they could operate for only four hours. Quite apart from interoperability difficulties with the United States, the filter issue is key. I was glad to see that assurances were given to the Select Committee on Defence yesterday that contingencies have been arranged to deal with that. Can the Minister confirm how long it will take to fit filters on more that 200 Challenger tanks? Have the filters already been constructed?

Following on from the NAO report, further questions remain unanswered. Have modifications been made to the plastic air filters on AS90 artillery pieces, which melted in operation Saif Sareea II in Oman? What improvements have been made for radio communication? Given that the Bowman system is not expected until 2004 at the earliest, will UK troops still depend on Clansman, which is not secure, or will they have to depend on mobile phones, as they did in Kosovo?

In addition, there are the questions that continue to surround the SA80 rifle. There is no doubt about the weapon's accuracy and balance, but it has been prone to a long list of defects that have been debated often in the House and which the Government assure us have now been dealt with by the Heckler and Koch upgrade. Nevertheless, there has been a profound lack of trust in the weapon's reliability, and many service men tell me that they would far prefer to see the SA80 replaced by the M-16 or M-4 carbine.

Is the Minister confident that, with the upgrade and new cleaning guidelines for the SA80 A2, we will not see a repeat of the experience of 45 Commando during Operation Jacana in Afghanistan? Are there any contingency plans to replace the SA80 at short notice if the realities of desert combat show that the weapon is still not reliable?

All those questions are legitimate and have been posed by members of the service community. I hope that the Government will take the opportunity to answer them without claiming that plans are not being drawn up by the MOD for future eventualities in Iraq. Plans are being drawn up, strategies are being developed, assets are being ring-fenced, spares are being cannibalised and service men and women have been told when they can expect leave to be cancelled.

All this also has a potential domestic impact. The call-up of reserve and Territorial Army medics would have an impact on the national health service, and account

[Angus Robertson]

must also be taken of the impending industrial dispute involving the Fire Brigades Union. Until recently, the Black Watch and the Scots Dragoon Guards were reportedly on stand-by for firefighting duty, but they have now returned to normal military training. While the ring-fencing of combat units based in Germany may be prudent in military planning terms, it raises questions about how domestic fire cover could be optimised if there were a strike. Similar manpower shortages are also likely to be highlighted in other areas, should there be a substantial additional deployment.

In the RAF alone, there are significant shortages of motor transport drivers and cooks following the increase in contractorisation. That puts an enormous strain on those serving in those blue-suit roles who already seem to be on the permanent detachment rotation. What contingency plans are being made to diminish the pressures on those and other key roles in the services? I am certain that, in his reply, the Minister will rightly praise the professionalism of the armed services, and I agree with that wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, the questions that I have posed have been raised by service men and women, and the issues are vital to the future of operations that may take place sooner rather than later.

5.51 pm

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Saddam Hussein polled 100 per cent. of the vote in a recent referendum not because of his telephone canvassing and popularity but because the main hope in life for most people in Iraq is to die a natural death—there is so much torture and execution there. He is not only evil but dangerous. He has invaded his neighbours in Iran and Kuwait, sent missiles to Israel, and killed hundreds of thousands of Kurds and Marsh Arabs. Indeed, he killed his own son-in-law, Hussein Kamal, in 1995—after he had disclosed plans for the manufacture of nuclear warheads—along with some 40 members of his family.

Since the weapons inspectors left Iraq in 1998, we have faced a threat that means that if we do not act, Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons, at which point it will be too late to use military force to decommission them. Many Members have pointed out that if we do anything to Saddam Hussein, he will unleash weapons of mass destruction such as biochemical weapons. Surely the argument must be that the longer we wait, the worse the threat of unleashing mass destruction becomes, particularly when he equips himself with nuclear weapons. That is why it is imperative that the United Nations act to enforce the decommissioning of his weapons of mass destruction.

The United States has not helped itself, because its attitude towards world affairs is demonstrably one of self-interest rather than world interest. We have only to look at Kyoto, in relation to the environment, or the effect of steel tariffs on free trade. There are also question marks over human rights in relation to the United States' lack of support for an international court. Indeed, the situation in Camp X-Ray is not altogether acceptable. One of my own constituents has been incarcerated there for nearly a year without any rights and without being charged. He should be either charged and punished or repatriated. Nevertheless, action must be taken before it is too late.

As I said in my intervention on the Secretary of State, it is important that we obtain a United Nations resolution that is simple and achievable, and that commands the respect of the rest of the United Nations. It is unacceptable to couch a resolution in terms of requiring 600 prisoners of war to be accounted for, or requiring the end of persecution and oil smuggling, or the provision of US armed guards. Such a resolution would not be accepted by others, and would inevitably trigger a war if implemented.

The Bali tragedy underlines the value of united action on world affairs. America has the economic and military might to act unilaterally to bring about regime change. However, that would be to attack individual countries rather than combat terror. Unilateral, pre-emptive action would open Pandora's box. It would legitimise an attack on Taiwan by China, continuing attacks on Chechnya by Russia, and an attack on Pakistan by India. Legitimising unilateral pre-emptive action would encourage the use, rather than the control, of weapons of mass destruction.

People have asked whether the Iraqi threat can be separated from combating terrorism. Despite what has been alleged, Saddam is a secular tyrant who has killed various mullahs and he is not a friend of al-Qaeda. It is a shame that people confuse the issue. However, managing the Iraqi threat has an impact on the war against terror. As the report by the Council on Foreign Relations disclosed today, the Saudi Arabians are not helping us much in gaining access to the funding streams for terrorism. George Bush's policy is not to use full United States power and influence to combat funding from Saudi Arabia to terrorist organisations. I presume that the reason for that is his short-term preoccupation with success in dealing with the threat of Iraq.

Clearly, we must balance our objectives. I hope that the focus and noise from the United States will change slightly after the 3 November congressional elections, when the political focus in America will be on world affairs rather than the awful state of the economy.

The United States needs to build trust in the world by using its diplomatic and economic power to create a better world. That does not simply mean neutralising the threat in Iraq, but using its strength to enforce peace in Palestine. The US is the only nation with the power to do that. In the opinion of many Arab states, unless it sends the right signals to Ariel Sharon, who is not a friend of peace, it will not demonstrate an even-handed approach to world affairs.

We have a historic opportunity not only to neutralise the Iraqi threat but to move forward on Palestine. Britain is the only voice to which the United States listens; it simply dismisses everyone else. We should say that we want a resolution, decommissioning and to avert war, but that decommissioning will occur only with the threat of war. We should also say that we want delivery on Palestine and the rebuilding of Afghanistan. If the global community witnesses solutions emerging in Palestine and the rebuilding of Afghanistan, it is more likely to support a collective ambition to sort out matters in Iraq.

We have an opportunity to make major headway and I hope that the British Government will take the lead in putting other issues on the agenda and in producing a simple, clear resolution about unfettered access and

decommissioning. There could then be progress on neutralising the Iraqi threat without necessarily having to resort to war.

5.58 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): The debate bears the all-encompassing title of "Defence in the world". It is therefore unsurprising that contributions have been made on a variety of subjects, not least on the US missile defence programme. I welcome the Secretary of State's statement that that vital subject will receive full consideration on the Floor of the House.

Compared with 15 or 20 years ago, the world is a more dangerous place. I have always been sceptical about the concept of a peace dividend. The day the cold war ended and the iron curtain was raised, the world became a less predictable and more dangerous place.

Only today, we have had reports of nuclear proliferation reaching North Korea. I wonder how many other countries are more advanced than we think in obtaining weapons of mass destruction.

We are paying the price for letting our guard down in the aftermath of the cold war and allowing rogue states to poach technicians and technical know-how. I hope that the Minister can reassure us that every necessary resource is being made available to monitor the whereabouts of those scientists and those with technical know-how to stop the spread going any further.

The entrenched positions of the two superpowers during the cold war years had a certain in-built safety. Both sides knew that ultimately the price of conflict would be too high. That created a safety valve, as evidenced by the Cuban missile crisis when the world stood at the brink of a precipice. That has now been replaced by asymmetric threats and a proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As a result, any threat will be non-discriminatory and non-proportional. There is no longer any division between conventional or legitimate targets and innocents as we understand them, the recent tragic events in Bali being just such an example. We must therefore learn to adapt our military capabilities and our ability to respond quickly and effectively to match the changed nature of these threats.

I wonder whether recent events have changed the support of the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister for a European Union rapid reaction force. There is a real probability that the Prime Minister, by identifying himself so closely with America, has inflicted untold damage on his relations with both the French and the Germans. What if the United States, backed by the United Kingdom, goes it alone in Iraq, with or without the requisite UN Security Council resolution? Where would that leave dreams of a rapid reaction force?

We know that the United States is pressing NATO to constitute a special unit to combat terrorism, with 21,000 soldiers to be ready at short notice. We know also that the United States expects to participate in such a venture, but that Europe is to provide most of the soldiers. It is said that the force would be operational by October 2006. Perhaps most intriguing of all is that NATO would take decisions about when and where the force would be used.

The report that I read went on to suggest that Donald Rumsfeld was using talk of a rapid response force to test the commitment and readiness of Europeans and our desire to spend our own money. As America increased its defence budget by $48 billion in the aftermath of 11 September—one-and-a-half times the French defence budget and twice the German budget—the Americans may be guilty of optimism. I would welcome the Secretary of State's comments.

Our immediate domestic concerns must be for those soldiers, sailors and airmen who may be about to be committed once again to a theatre of war. Their equipment must be of the highest order, and I was reassured by the Secretary of State's comments on the SA80 A2 rifle. Their families must be properly looked after. Any assessment of overstretch must take into account the long periods of enforced separation for those families. We must not denude one area of commitment to shore up another. I have Northern Ireland in mind, where the suspension of Stormont may mean that the police force needs even more, not less, support from the Army.

We need a guarantee that our troops will be properly prepared to meet any chemical or biological attack. Can the Minister give us an assurance that the Government are 100 per cent. happy this time about the inoculations that our troops will have to have? Finally, there should be a guarantee that recruits who are attracted to join the forces by the possibility of conflict will be subject to the same rigorous training and standards as normal entrants and that the process will not be accelerated to fill gaps that have been created by undermanning. Nothing must stand in the way of our armed forces and their training, their discipline, their equipment and, ultimately, their professionalism, on which over the coming months we may well come to rely upon once again.

6.4 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Any debate on this subject must address the twin threats of international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The attacks of 11 September, and now in Bali, have shown the deadly and ruthless nature of the threat that we must defend against. Despite the success of the action in Afghanistan in removing al-Qaeda's command, control and training, it is clear that dangerous cells remain scattered throughout the globe. Action against those cells requires international co-operation not just on military action, but on finance, intelligence and so on, and that must happen. There is an international will to have an international response to terrorism, but there is not the same will to act against rogue states with weapons of mass destruction, in particular Iraq, which will form the main part of my contribution.

It is clear from constituents who have contacted me that there is still considerable concern about such action. The public need to be convinced about the threat. Intelligence information has convinced me that Iraq is capable of delivering warheads equipped with weapons of mass destruction to targets in the middle east. Coupled with Saddam's past record on Iran and his treatment of his people, that capability constitutes a threat to the middle east, including our NATO allies.

The threat must be taken seriously because if Saddam is left as he is, the threat will grow, and with it his power over his neighbours, over whom he can exercise the power of a bully and the power of fear. I would not rule

[Jim Knight]

out military action as a means of dealing with the threat, but to justify taking such action now requires a belief that a failure to do so carries risks so great that they outweigh the dangers inherent in such action. It would be dangerous in the extreme to take military action without at least the tacit support and agreement of a significant majority of nations in the region. Although the vast majority of middle eastern states clearly do not support Saddam, it appears that the prospect of military action attracts even less backing. It is similarly vital that we guard against inflaming radical Islamic elements. We must minimise the likelihood of sparking terrorist outrages akin to those in Bali at the weekend.

The public need the reassurance that the UN is sufficiently convinced by the case made by the Bush Administration and, to some extent, our Government. They do not trust the United States and bilateral action with it would isolate us in the world in the way that we want Iraq to be isolated. I would be equally wary of military action that promised to achieve a regime change. It would be great to see the back of Saddam and it may be necessary to end his regime, but that must not be the end in itself. Any military action must focus on the outcome of dismantling Iraq's destructive capabilities, not on regime change for its own sake. Furthermore, any military approach needs to be achievable while minimising the loss of civilian life. Previous experience has shown us that Saddam positions many of his key installations close to heavily populated areas, and military strategy must take that into account.

In simple terms, I could support action if it is backed by the UN, but it should not be seen as giving in to the ambitions of the United States. This country places little trust in the Bush Administration. The same is true of Europe and across the world. A year ago, they had the world's sympathy. Sadly, it appears that they have lost it. Prior to 11 September, the US was retreating from the world and withdrawing from international commitments such as Kyoto. After the attacks, it showed great restraint and responded with broad international support in Afghanistan. However, in the past six months we have had the US steel tariffs, the Farm Acts, the blocking of progress in Johannesburg and the refusal to sign countless international treaties. The Administration's promises to rebuild a civil society in Afghanistan are yet to materialise. Meanwhile, President Bush pursues his axis of evil and, as a result, countries such as Iran worry that they may be next. There is also the lack of US sanction against the Israeli Government, which has been well discussed in the House. For those reasons, it has been a struggle for many to understand why our Government appear to remain so close to the Bush Administration.

We are beginning to see beyond that public face, however. We are a constraining influence in Washington. Our voice has more than once tilted the balance of arguments between hawks and doves in the White House. There have been several instances in which our Government's quiet influence on US policy has resulted in a more measured approach to conflicts around the world. If a shoulder-to-shoulder public stance allows a small nation to wield a moderating influence in private over a dangerous belligerent superpower, it is a price worth paying. There is also a clear justification in maintaining pressure on Saddam. He needs to understand that there is no alternative but to co-operate with the UN. The prospect of military action must focus his mind. It may be right to act now with force, but only with the international authority of the UN, not with the imperial authority of the US.

We must tackle our threats robustly but in an environment of a globalised threat. The response must be global, based on international co-operation with other Europeans, NATO allies and former cold war enemies, so that we have a legal, principled and justifiable response to the rogue elements that constitute the threat.

6.10 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): About an hour ago I was hoping that my speech would take a gentle trot through the issues of NATO missile defence, Iraq and so on, but I am afraid that the House will now be treated to a hectic gallop. In the short time that I have available, I shall focus on the issue of pre-emption, which was raised at the beginning of the debate but which has not been touched on in detail by other hon. Members.

I briefly preface my remarks with a comment about the parliamentary armed forces scheme. The hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) mentioned HMS Grafton. In August I was fortunate enough to be one of four hon. Members to be on HMS Grafton. The scheme is excellent and well organised and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the dedication and professionalism of that tremendous crew and its captain. According to recent reports they secured a £60 million drugs haul and that is very much to their credit. Since then, there have been reports that the patrol may be part of a possible range of cuts of 10 surface ships. I hope that at the end of the debate the Minister will be able categorically to deny that.

I now turn to pre-emption. Just a month ago in September, the United States Government published their national security strategy, setting out their aims and ambitions quite clearly. In many ways it is clearer than many documents produced by our Government. At its heart is a clear change in defence strategy from the doctrine of deterrence to that of pre-emption. It states:

> "We will not hesitate to act alone if necessary, to exercise our right of self defence by acting pre-emptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country."

As hon. Members will appreciate, the US Government are effectively basing their doctrine on the principle of national self-defence. Indeed, they refer to article 51 of the UN charter. Whether or not we agree with that point, such a doctrine poses fundamental military, political and diplomatic questions. In military terms, for example, what forces will we need in future? What balance will we need between regular and special forces? What effect will pre-emption have on the existing distinction between military action and law enforcement agencies—a distinction that is becoming increasingly blurred. Politically, does pre-emption require greater international collaboration, especially in terms of intelligence agencies, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) said? What does

this mean for our civil rights? Is there a danger that in trying to defend our freedom, we could snuff it out in the process? In terms of NATO, will the principle of pre-emption mean that we now need to review the very heart of the Atlantic treaty, in other words the principle of collective self-defence in article 5?

All those questions need to be considered and debated, and sadly I do not have the time to do that. I have looked for a detailed analysis from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and a detailed analysis and assessment from the Ministry of Defence as to whether, why and how the Government intend to replace deterrence with pre-emption, but aside from the odd unscripted comment from the Prime Minister and the slightly inadequate comments from the Secretary of State at the beginning of the debate, the Government still seem unwilling to consider fully the implications of pre-emption and then to allow us to participate in such a debate.

I conclude with a few questions for the Minister, and I hope that he will respond to them at the end of the debate. What studies have the Government commissioned to consider the military, political and security implications of the pre-emptive doctrine? What discussions have taken place between Departments on this issue and what opportunities—as have been cited for missile defence—will be provided for the House to consider the policy and make sure that we understand it and can work out the implications of it. This is a vital issue that shapes the whole of our defence, and I hope that the Minister will address it fully in his reply.

6.15 pm

Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Like others, I hope for another opportunity to say something about the new chapter of the strategic defence review, which deals with network-centric capability, defence diplomacy and NATO enlargement. Only a few minutes are available to me, however, and I know that another Member has been waiting to speak. I shall therefore concentrate on the theme of partnership and co-operation.

As a nation, we cannot go it alone. We are an island, but if we are to defend our homeland effectively and protect our interests across the world we must co-operate on a global basis. An effective UK defence policy must take the world as its backdrop. International terrorism takes the lives of British citizens wherever they are on the planet, as we have seen again this week so tragically in Bali. I know that all Members will extend their deepest sympathies to the families and friends of those who were killed or injured there.

We cannot hope, as a nation, to have soldiers stationed in every part of the world where there are British citizens. We must co-operate with Governments and allies to share intelligence, and to detect and then deal with terrorists. We must also co-operate to tackle the causes of terrorism and promote international development, peace and stability, and law and order. I believe that the United Kingdom has played a vital role over the years, especially since 11 September. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State, the Government and all involved for what they have achieved, and to our armed forces for maintaining their excellent reputation for professionalism and skill in all parts of the world.

I shall concentrate on Iraq in the time that remains to me. All alliances have their tensions, and never is that more so than in the case of the United States. We as a country must constantly assess what we consider to be in our interests. When we encounter real or potential disagreement with the United States, where do we draw the line?

For me and, I think, for my constituents, these are the key questions that should decide the extent to which we should support US policy on Iraq and be prepared to take military action without United Nations approval. Why now? What is unique about Iraq? In particular, what is unique about North Korea, given today's news? What type of military action would be effective, and what will it achieve, given that Operation Desert Fox seemed to have little or no effect? What price will be paid by our troops, by the Iraqi people and by the global coalition if we go in without UN approval? And what next for the nation of Iraq?

"Why now?" is the question that I am constantly asked by my constituents, meaning "Why didn't we finish him off in 1991?", to put it bluntly—and also meaning "Why now, when there appears to be no evidence of a clear link between Iraq and al-Qaeda and 11 September?" I have to say that the dossier, horrifying as it is, does not present to me sufficient new evidence to support a pre-emptive strike without UN approval.

Let me end by suggesting to President Bush and his advisers that they should read the first paragraph of our MOD's "The Future Strategic Context for Defence". Under the heading "A Lesson from History", it says

> "In 546BC, Croesus King of Lydia was considering the possibility of mounting a pre-emptive attack across the River Halys against his increasingly threatening Persian neighbours. Undecided how to act, he consulted the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi on his prospects for success. 'Croesus, if you cross the Halys you will destroy a mighty empire' came the divine response. Delighted, Croesus proceeded to launch his attack, only to suffer a shattering defeat. His empire was annexed by the Persians."

It then says at the bottom:

> "Accurately predicting the future course of military events is a tricky business."

6.20 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire) with her usual trenchant common sense—something to which we are used on the Select Committee on Defence. It is also a pleasure to attempt to follow the Father of the House. I, too, was a member of the 7th Armoured Brigade, albeit at a rather different stage. One or two of the hon. Gentleman's remarks bear further examination.

I, too, feel passionately that our men and women under arms should be committed to battle understanding the legality and rectitude of their course. It would be wrong for our forces to go into action without that being fully explained and without the country behind them. I hope to ask the Government to make it clear why our men and women, to borrow a phrase from President Bush, should put themselves in harm's way and with a clear conscience.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) spoke about the lines of operation for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist tactics in

[Patrick Mercer]

future. At the Prague summit the biggest challenge that will lie ahead of the reforged and regrouped NATO will undoubtedly be creating a force that is sufficiently light on its feet to do this sort of operation. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) pointed out, the 21,000 soldiers are likely to be earmarked for counter-terrorist operations. They will have to carry out political, economic, psychological, humanitarian and military lines of operation. The theories of counter-insurgency that have served us well for 30, 50 or perhaps 100 years are now looking a bit dated. NATO's challenge will be to adapt to a doctrine of pre-emption that may involve an early deployment of food aid rather than Tomahawk missiles. Our forces have to be capable of dealing not just with policemen—that point was made eloquently earlier—but with non-governmental organisations, and of dishing out food and, if necessary, violence. That will be difficult. Not many nations can handle that correctly. I think that our forces can. NATO will find it difficult and it will be a challenge.

Moving swiftly on, the Government should point out that the nature of al-Qaeda and in particular the fundamentalists whom we are seeing now operating in Indonesia is wholly different from anything that the papers would lead us to believe. Headlines such as, "Terror is Back" after the Bali bomb are wholly misleading. It is a tribute to the security and intelligence forces around the world that attacks like that on the French tanker came to not very much. It succeeded, but it did not kill—I believe it killed one man. There are a host of other operations mounted by such terrorists that are not successful and do not make the headlines. We must understand that the potential for violence is always there and that the devices such as we have seen in Bali are just around the corner.

It is not helpful either to compare al-Qaeda or any of their cohorts with the IRA. We can understand the IRA. It even had platoons, battalions and companies. Al-Qaeda and this style of fundamentalism is more a philosophy than a military force. Until we get our heads round that, we shall see continuing the ludicrous headlines that we have seen this week and we shall be unprepared for the next strike.

Reference has been made to the Prime Minister's Bali statement, in which he made a clear distinction between weapons of mass destruction and global or international terrorism. Many of the eloquent statements that we have heard tonight have come from Members who believe that those are two distinct themes; they may be complementary but, at the moment, they are not merging. They are separate and although they may feed off one another, they do not require pre-emptive action to stop the two becoming one. However, the Prime Minister has made the point clearly that the two might merge, with horrific consequences.

I urge Ministers to answer this question: why in the dossier was there no section concentrating on international or global terrorism? Why was the famous link not made between Baghdad and al-Qaeda? I understand the argument, which has been well made tonight, about source protection, but the fact remains that, from open sources, we have heard about the operations of people like Ansar al-Islam; groups operating in Iraqi Kurdistan that are armed, equipped, paid and trained by Baghdad, partially manned with al-Qaeda members and with every intention—if what the papers tell us is true—of operating against western targets. There are any number of other indications of the connection between the two.

Mr. Rumsfeld has made it clear in America. His defence on this point has been to say, "Look. We are the Government. We have access to excellent intelligence. Believe us and trust us." I have not yet heard that argument deployed by the British Government. I believe that it would be effective and persuasive. I challenge Ministers to convince us—to convince the doubters—of the rectitude of their cause. I challenge the Government to make sure that our fighting men and women are ready and properly motivated to fight, and know that they go forward with a just cause behind them.

A few days ago, it was Bali. Next week, next month or next year, it could be Basingstoke. Next time, however, it will not be several hundred pounds of plastic explosive. It could so easily be a nuclear warhead. Let us operate before we become victims in the way that other unfortunates have.

6.27 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): We have heard a series of powerful speeches from Members on both sides of the House, representing different opinions and mainly focusing on the threat from Iraq and from international terrorism. As a former Whip, I can say that, without exception, all speakers have been volunteers; no speakers have been dragged in to fill up the debate.

We should distinguish between those colleagues who, despite the evidence produced by the British or American Governments, remain unconvinced of the threat from Iraq, and many other colleagues—who I suspect reflect public opinion—who are still not convinced but would like to be. This debate is not the end of the matter and we will see it continue over the next two or three weeks.

I was disturbed that some Members tried to make a distinction between President Bush and members of his Cabinet, and the American people. They suggested that President Bush is some form of demented lunatic who is about to lead the world into world war. I remember similar accusations being made in the 1980s about President Reagan. Whatever President Reagan's faults and whatever issues he got wrong, he was broadly correct in his assessment of the international scene.

The United States of America is a superpower, a large and powerful one that ultimately underpins the United Nations. If we want the will of the United Nations to be enforced, it is the United States, for all its many faults, to which we look to deliver the UN's security principles. I therefore caution colleagues who merely wish to make devils out of the present American Administration: we have the ability to talk to them and to influence them.

I suspect that historians will look back on the 1990s as a decade in which we in Britain felt generally safe. I exclude from that statement the people of Northern Ireland and the terrorist threat within the United Kingdom. However, we would probably have to go back 100 years to look for a direct external threat. Most of us who are over 40 know only too well what it is like to live in decades in which we have felt the possibility of

direct threat against the United Kingdom. The 1990s was a decade in which, under successive Governments, we were able to think about reducing the amount of defence expenditure and changing what we expected of the military. I believe that that decade is now seen as a period of political transition with, as a number of hon. Members have pointed out, increased political instability in every region and proliferation in weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. That was highlighted very eloquently by my hon. Friends the Members for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) and for East Devon (Mr. Swire).

The Secretary of State rightly pointed out that the strategic defence review was designed to establish a framework for United Kingdom defence and security over the next 10 to 15 years, including an expeditionary force capability, power projection, working within coalitions and a new generation of equipment. I remember the debates that we had on that from my time as a Front Bench defence spokesman. In some respects I see that the arguments have not changed, but in others they have changed quite dramatically.

The Secretary of State and Ministers will disagree with me, but there is no doubt that most people in the Ministry of Defence, while welcoming and actively participating in establishing the SDR, believe that it was underfunded. I welcome the increased money that has been given to the Ministry of Defence, although I think that many people in it believe that it amounts to little more than a standstill budget. Before Ministers say that this is merely party politics, I should point out that I think that this is a challenge for all the political parties. The nature of the threat that has been laid out by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence and others is on such a scale that it will be challenging, to say the least, to meet our defence requirements, even with our current budget. That will pose many political problems for all the parties.

I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State effectively said that, under the old SDR, the cut in our volunteer reservists was too great. Colleagues on both sides conducted a great campaign, as a result of which there was a reverse by the Ministry of Defence. There is now a greater requirement than ever before for our reservists.

The debate on defence in the world includes not only power projection and expeditionary force capability but is directly linked with defending the UK against weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism. One of the bases of the strategic defence review of three years ago, which most defence opinion believed, was that there was very little direct threat to what the Americans would call the homeland. That has changed quite dramatically. One of the awful ironies of the world in which we live today—the new strategic environment—is that civilians are more likely to be casualties than the military and are certainly more vulnerable, as the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) said.

This debate has shown four key areas where we need to think ahead and, I hope, have future debates. A number of colleagues flagged up the assumption that we are now in an era of pre-emptive strategy and regime change, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk), who did so very eloquently. We seem almost to have drifted into that. In the time available, I will not enter into a theological military debate on that subject, but it is an important step change. There are arguments for and against, but I look forward to hearing either the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary or the Secretary of State for Defence enunciating that strategy and why they believe that it is the strategy for the future.

Who am I to gainsay Professor Sir Michael Howard, who, as retiring president of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, challenged the IISS to do some serious thinking on the subject? That is, first and foremost, a major strategic debate that we need to have. It is not only an academic debate; from it will flow many issues connected with policy, budgets and defence organisation.

A number of hon. Members commented on the second area, which is the development by the United States of a technological war-fighting capability on a mind-boggling scale. The hon. Members for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) and for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) and my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and others touched on this matter, not only in terms of a pre-emptive strategy but also the development of a ballistic missile defence.

Like my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, I warmly welcome the statement made by the Secretary of State. However, the House will recognise that once again the development of a ballistic missile defence has enormous strategic connotations and will be challenging for the defence budget. It also means that we in Britain are just about keeping up with the United States of America in its military technological advances. Most of our European neighbours are way behind, with the exception of France. Unless we are very careful, we are likely to see a two-tier NATO, with the USA on one tier, Britain somewhere in the middle, and the rest of Europe on the other. Within the next two or three years, the difference will be like that between an old horse-drawn, foot-mounted infantry division and a mechanised armoured division. That will mean that the ability of the European members of NATO, including us, to participate in American-style operations will be extremely limited.

The third area, on which once again there was considerable consensus, was the business of reforming NATO. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State and my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and for Newark (Patrick Mercer) pointed out the major problems that NATO has in dealing with the new strategic environment and, in particular, the failure of a number of European countries to reverse the cuts in defence budgets, which the Secretary of State flagged up. We have enormous military potential in NATO to meet the sort of threats that we now face, but we really have to do more in that area.

Finally, I shall say a brief word on homeland security. Following 11 September, the Government have begun to take steps to co-ordinate the response to threats against the United Kingdom. I warmly welcome the appointment of Sir David Omand as the security and intelligence co-ordinator in the Cabinet Office. He is a man of tremendous experience of the defence and security world. As far as the Ministry of Defence is

[Mr. Keith Simpson]

concerned, the military are in support of the civil power and in most areas the Home Office appears to be the lead Ministry.

In the new chapter of the SDR, we learn that the MOD is establishing a reaction force of reservists—some 6,000-strong—to be capable of a rapid response. May I ask the Minister what progress has been made in establishing this rapid reaction force? What is its organisation? Is it being newly equipped? How is it trained, and to whom is it responsible?

In commenting on the Government's response to the threat of terrorist attack in the UK, the Defence Select Committee's report, "Defence and Security in the UK", stated that the Government were "confusing activity with achievement". That may be unfair as only a year has gone by, but the thesis that I am advancing is that defence in the world is not just about facing threats overseas; as many hon. Members have said, it is about the direct threat to the United Kingdom. That threat will involve deterring terrorists in the belief that, if they try to get weapons of mass destruction or to carry out terrorist acts within the UK, we stand a fair chance of preventing them through intelligence, through our armed forces abroad, and with our allies. Secondly—this is very important in terms of public confidence—if something like that were to occur, we must have the ability and the resources to cope with the aftermath.

Our armed forces bring immense experience to everything from war fighting to humanitarian operations. They are one area of the public sector by which, on every occasion, the Prime Minister knows that he will not be let down. They expect not only our general support, but the resources to enable them to achieve the objectives we set them. In the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism, the distinction between military and civilian has become blurred. There are no quick fixes in this area; as both President Bush and the Prime Minister said, we are in for a long haul. I believe that what the Government are doing is correct, and that they are doing it for the right reasons. In addition, they are doing it because they believe that the threat is so serious that, if we do not take action now, we will bear the consequences on a most horrific scale.

6.42 pm

The Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I begin by thanking hon. Members for their wide-ranging contributions to today's debate. I was going to say that this was the first outing of the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) as a defence spokesperson, but he reminded us that he has done it before briefly.

Mr. Keith Simpson: In opposition.

Mr. Ingram: In opposition, that is. I want to congratulate him on his new role, and I look forward to further debates with him. I wholly agree with the sentiment that he expressed—powerful contributions have been made in this debate, and we all learned from them. Let us hope that that is a two-way process.

Defence in the world is certainly a broad topic, and the contributions to the debate reflect that fact. The hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk asked about homeland security and defence in the UK, and I should remind him that we will have a full debate on that subject in two weeks' time, so it would be inappropriate to presage it, or even to enter into such a discussion. There will be more time then to deal with that issue in greater depth, and I look forward to his contribution. I will read what he has said, because it has given us heads-up on the possible responses.

Some 20 Members have contributed to the debate, and the issues raised have been wide-ranging: missile defence, the vexed issue of the threat of international terrorism and its relationship to the debate on what we do about Iraq, defence policy, deterrence and pre-emption, Army manning strength, Challenger 2 tanks, and the recent Saif Sareea training exercise. We also touched on the future of NATO, on UK and international defence budgets, and on UK defence sales—indeed, they are just a few of the issues that were raised.

I listened with interest to the contribution of the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir). Although the Scottish National party has recently launched its new policy document, he did not mention it. I hoped that we would get some explanation of it, but I think that it involves Scotland looking inwards, rather than outwards. It is a very interesting policy document running to many pages. What is interesting about it is that it completely fails to mention NATO. We know that the SNP is an anti-NATO party, but the hon. Gentleman missed the opportunity to set out his arguments in relation to this matter. Bearing in mind that he would campaign to rip Scotland out of the United Kingdom, creating uncertainty in an alliance at a time when there is growing threat, we have not had the benefit of his thoughts. Perhaps he disagrees with his party's policy, but he did not tell us that either.

As hon. Members have observed, these are challenging and testing times for defence. We face new threats, and we must urgently seek new ways to protect ourselves, and our interests, from them. That has meant that our armed forces, and the all too often unsung civil servants who support them, have spent the last months working extremely hard as we have tried to update our defence plans and postures. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to that hard work, from which we all benefit. I recognise that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) paid a similar tribute to staff and frontline forces on behalf of their parties.

The al-Qaeda attack in the United States on 11 September last year has been called many things, from a "nightmare" to a "wake-up call". It has certainly instilled a new urgency and a new focus on how best we deal, nationally and internationally, with the increased and continuing threats posed by groups such as al-Qaeda and by rogue states such as Iraq. In opening today's debate, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a number of important points on which hon. Members have alighted, such as his remarks on weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile defence.

On missile defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge), who, I think, has left the Chamber, made his usual case against the development. As I said earlier, debate is a two-way process, and if he is trying to persuade us, perhaps he should wait and allow those who argue against his case

to develop theirs, and he may learn something, too. If he reads *Hansard*, however, he should read the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard), who made a very thoughtful contribution on what is becoming an increasingly important issue.

On that point, I have nothing new to add to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already said. I can only reiterate that the United States Administration have taken no specific decisions about the precise future architecture of a United States missile defence system. My right hon. Friend made it clear that if we were to receive a request from the United States to use Fylingdales, or any other UK facility, for missile defence purposes, we would consider it very seriously. The Government would agree to such a request only if we were satisfied that the overall security of the UK and the alliance would be enhanced. My right hon. Friend also clarified how this debate will be progressed in the future, and how we will proceed to examine the issue as it develops.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also spoke of our belief in taking the fight to the enemy militarily, and of acting proactively on the diplomatic front to help to defeat terrorism. We are investing heavily in new systems to allow us to do the former, such as the Apache attack helicopter, Eurofighter, the joint strike fighter, the new aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy and a host of cutting-edge technology that will better link up such systems in real time.

On the diplomatic front, we are striving to secure and reinforce friendships across the world, offering help in strategic terms and on a humanitarian basis to help destroy the roots of terror before they can grow.

Mr. Dalyell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ingram: I would prefer to reply to the points that my hon. Friend raised in the debate. If I have time to take an intervention, I shall do so.

Several points were raised about the suitability of some of our equipment, not least the SA80 personal weapon system. I welcome the comments made by the hon. Members for North Essex and for East Devon (Mr. Swire) accepting the assurances given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the matter. The hon. Member for North Essex was, of course, given a full opportunity to examine what testing had been carried out on that weapon system. General Sir Mike Jackson was not at that event, but he is one of the most respected military officers of his generation and the next Chief of the General Staff. He is undoubtedly a soldier's soldier. He has joined the marines and paratroopers who have fought with the SA80 A2 in making it clear that, in their professional opinion, the rifle is among the best available. Those who know General Jackson are aware that he is not a man to be trifled with, and, to those who still have doubts, I say that his judgment and that of other professional experts should be listened to. Politicians and Ministers have a role to play, but the soldiers who use the system will be the best judges at the end of the day.

In the time available, I shall try to deal with some of the issues raised in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) in an intervention and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) referred to the recent comments made by the head of the CIA to Congress that Iraq does not pose an immediate threat to the US. This issue is not just about whether there is an immediate threat to the US or to the UK but about the unique threat that Iraq poses to the middle east and beyond. It is about the increasing threat that Saddam will pose if he is left unchecked. It is about Iraq's clear violation of UN Security Council resolutions and international law. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that the purpose of any action that we might take should be the disarmament of Iraq. Let me make it clear that Iraq's disarmament is in our national interest as a responsible member of the international community. It is right to make it the primary purpose of our international efforts.

The hon. Member for North Essex talked about the future of NATO and said how much Saddam Hussein must rejoice at Europe and the US falling out about how to deal with Iraq. The United Nations is clearly there to examine the issue and to try to iron out differences, and not all European countries take the same approach to this issue. Therefore, it is wrong of the hon. Gentleman to lump Europe as a whole together and to say that we have fallen out with the US. Such an assertion is wrong. Europe stood united against Osama bin Laden and international terrorism after 11 September, and Europe stands united on the evil nature of Saddam Hussein's regime. The hon. Gentleman's obsession with—probably more accurately against—Europe distorts his judgment on these important issues.

The hon. Gentleman used the phrase "Euro army", but there is no such thing as a Euro army any more than there is a NATO army or a UN army. Nor indeed is there a European rapid reaction force. National forces will come together for specific EU-led military operations as part of the European security and defence policy.

Mr. Jenkin: Why does the force have to be outside NATO? Why is it not inside NATO, as originally agreed in the Berlin-plus arrangements?

Mr. Ingram: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman fully understands the proposal. The force will not be outside NATO in the graphic way that he described.

Mr. Jenkin: Yes, it will.

Mr. Ingram: I shall not take a pantomime approach, but will write to the hon. Gentleman to set out the relationship between NATO and the emerging EU approach and the way in which there will be a connection between NATO assets in command and control terms and the EU.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No, because I had promised to deal with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

[Mr. Ingram]

The hon. Member for North Essex made a 50-minute contribution on behalf of the Conservative party and, given his fears and concerns, I wish to ask him who said this:

"The risk to NATO, to the transatlantic link and to the Euro-American relationship does not stem from what Europe is building. This risk could only come from Europe not doing it."

That was said by Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's central charge that the US and Europe have fallen out does not appear to be borne out by that statement.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about HMS Sheffield coming out of service and the question of naval strength. For the benefit of the House it is worth pointing out that between 1992 and 1997, under the Tory Government, 43 surface fleet warships were taken out of service. There are particular reasons for taking HMS Sheffield out of service early, one of which is the new cycle of maintenance, which means that ships can be on the surface for longer. We therefore believe that we can operate with 31 ships, rather than 32.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow asked several questions, and I shall deal with two of them. He asked how the UK would respond to the contamination of British forces' equipment with a biological agent, and he referred to a recently published article on the matter. I assure him that we take very seriously the threat to UK armed forces personnel and equipment of contamination by chemical and biological hazards. I am not prepared to comment on the capabilities of specific equipment because it could have operational implications. We would see any use of CB weapons as extremely serious and treat it accordingly. It would be wrong to speculate on our response because there are so many scenarios.

The UK adopts a multi-layered approach to defence against the use of CB weapons. That includes being able to detect a chemical or biological threat, warning of a hazard, providing physical protection for personnel, managing any subsequent hazards and having available appropriate medical counter-measures to protect people. Primarily we would seek to avoid the contamination of UK forces through the avoidance of direct exposure. However, the contamination of some equipment could be unavoidable. In the events of troops and/or equipment becoming contaminated, decontamination would be undertaken using equipment issued to each unit. The precise nature of that activity would depend on the tactical situation and the level of contamination. The aim would be to enable the unit to remain operational.

My hon. Friend also asked about the WE177 tactical nuclear bombs. That particular weapon has been out of service for some considerable time, and all bombs have been dismantled. I think that my hon. Friend has asked that question before, and been given that answer. I hope that my reply will lay the matter to rest.

I genuinely like the contributions by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). He weighs his words carefully and he is very passionate and committed. I rarely agree with him, but I still value his input. However, he made an unfair attack on the staff at the Deepcut depot. The matter must be set in the context of the ongoing police inquiry, which inhibits what I can reasonably say at this stage.

We recognise, however, that deep concerns have been expressed. As a responsible employer, we have in place mechanisms and procedures to examine those concerns. We are therefore looking thoroughly at our internal practices, with a special, in-depth appraisal of initial training of non-officer recruits of all three services. That work is being conducted independently of service and commands, and is directly reported to Ministers. In the spirit of openness the findings will be made public.

I am mindful of the fact that the Defence Committee is due to conduct its own inquiry into this most important of areas early next year, and as ever I look forward to a constructive, critical report. I ask hon. Members to wait for the facts to emerge—many can be speculated on—before reaching judgments on the matter.

The hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), who is also not in his place, asked about Army manning levels. The current manning requirement is 106,978. That figure was decided on as a result of a review of the Army's future manpower requirement.

As of September 2002, the whole Army's strength stood at 101,665, so there is a significant shortfall, but recent performance has been particularly encouraging, with strength increasing by 1,361 personnel in the past 12 months. I hope that that will lay to rest that hoary old chestnut, which keeps coming back time after time.

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): For the convenience of the House, we shall take together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Road User Charging

Ordered,

That the Road User Charging (Charges and Penalty Charging) (London) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 2285) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Road User Charging (Enforcement and Adjudication) (London) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 2313) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Trunk Road Charging Schemes (Bridges and Tunnels) (England) Procedure Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 2303) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE CONVENTION

Motion made,

That the Order [12th June] relating to the Standing Committee on the Convention be amended, in paragraph (4)(b), by leaving out the words 'or be counted in the quorum'.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That at the sitting on Tuesday 22nd October, paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) shall apply to proceedings on Motions in the name of Mr Charles Kennedy as if the day were one of the Opposition Days allotted under paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business).

That, at the sitting on Thursday 24th October, the first Motion in the name of the Prime Minister for the adjournment of the House shall lapse three hours after it has been made or at Five o'clock, whichever is the later.

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 23rd October, if proceedings on opposition business are not concluded before Seven o'clock any Private Business set down by direction of the Chairman of Ways and Means for that hour shall stand over to the conclusion of proceedings on opposition business and may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours after it has been entered upon.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Policing (Strangford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

7.1 pm

Mrs. Iris Robinson (Strangford): It was Edmund Burke who said:

"Good order is the foundation of all good things".

In that vein, it is crucial to the maintenance of order throughout this country that the laws that exist to protect people's rights are enforced to the letter. It is our duty to strive to ensure that those who would wish to see law and order undermined and damaged are punished accordingly.

Responsibility for the enforcement of law and order rests with police forces throughout the country, supported by the judicial system. However, if the criminal is not brought before the court to face conviction, the processes of law and order cannot be applied and the offender remains outside the system. In addition, pressure on police resources, which is growing on a weekly, if not daily, basis, means that officers' ability to apprehend offenders is decreasing at a proportionate rate. Without a vehicle to enforce the law effectively, the law itself is undermined. The unparalleled lack of manpower being experienced by the Police Service is having a hugely negative impact on the force's ability to maintain law and order and is affecting all areas of Northern Ireland, including Strangford.

Strangford consists of a section of the Castlereagh district command unit, the majority of the Ards district command unit and part of the Down district command unit. In the past, Castlereagh, which has a population in excess of 70,000, has been serviced by two police stations at Carryduff and Dundonald. As a result of the cuts imposed by Patten, Dundonald and Carryduff stations have had their operational capacity removed and now remain only as a cosmetic police presence in those areas. All calls are now diverted to the DCU headquarters at Castlereagh, where a response is committed. The Castlereagh area takes in Ballybeen, Northern Ireland's second largest housing estate, which has 10,000 residents and is covered by the police station at Dundonald. Between April 2001 and April 2002, Dundonald police station received more than 6,000 telephone calls from the public, 5,317 of which required police attendance.

As a result of the Patten report, Dundonald police station now has only one inspector, one beat manager and five beat officers attached to it. It also has a further eight officers fulfilling security and guard duties. Of that cohort, two officers must deal with inquiries and firearms renewals on a daily basis. When shift patterns are taken into consideration, that means that Dundonald station is unable to provide any full-time beat services for its immediate area or to the second largest housing estate in Northern Ireland, and must rely on services from Castlereagh, several miles across the city.

Similarly, Carryduff police station is situated in an area of suburban Belfast that has witnessed a huge expansion in population over recent years. Over the past year, more than 13,000 calls were made to Carryduff police station, yet earlier this year the people of Carryduff were forced to lead a campaign to prevent its closure, which had been proposed in order to cut back on expenditure. Public meetings were held and a petition carrying several thousand signatures from both sides of the community was presented. An alternative shop-front facility had been proposed, but given the clear and present terrorist threat, that would neither protect the officers from terrorist attack, nor encourage members of the public to enter it.

Carryduff police station has one sergeant and four officers attached to it, again resulting in its capacity to provide a proactive service to the local community becoming a practical impossibility. To meet the constraints of the Patten Commission recommendations, provision of security has been centralised to DCU headquarters at Castlereagh. Of a total of 111 regular officers currently serving, only 27 are available for response duties, which breaks down to about seven per shift to cover the whole area. Moreover, they have only four cars and one motorcycle available to them.

The story in the Ards district command unit is much the same. In the town of Newtownards, which has a population in excess of 30,000, 45 officers are registered for day-to-day duties. Taking into account those officers who have been seconded elsewhere, there are about 10 full-time officers to cover each shift. Of those 10, two or three officers will carry out security and administrative tasks, and taking into account those on sick leave and holiday, six officers are left to look after a significant town. That means that there are two in a car, two on the beat and a relief back at the station.

As for the police stations at Comber, Donaghadee, Greyabbey and Portaferry, none operates on a full-time basis. Officers who are able to work must complete security and administrative duties. That has minimised, if not removed, the force's ability to provide a visible presence on the ground and a deterrent against crime. The service falls far short of the security that residents demand.

The Patten report recommended that there should be a core of 7,500 full-time officers in a normalised environment, yet at present there are only 6,911 full-time officers, who are required to meet an ever-increasing burden. In April this year, Assistant Chief Constable Alan McQuillan admitted that officers in some areas were being forced to work up to 80 or 90 hours a week to make up for the shortfall in manpower.

At a time when complying with Patten is forcing a cut in manpower, both domestic and terrorist-related crimes are spiralling out of control. Between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002, recorded crime in Northern Ireland increased by 16.6 per cent. to 139,786 offences. At the same time, the overall clearance rate decreased by 7 per cent. to 20.1 per cent.

In Castlereagh, the number of recorded crimes increased from 3,218 to 4,802—an increase of 50 per cent. on the previous year, while the detection rate decreased to a miserable 16 per cent. We now face a situation where crime in Castlereagh has risen by an incredible 125 per cent. since the signing of the Belfast agreement in 1998. Problems in Castlereagh will be compounded this year by the fact that 23 officers have accepted the severance deal offered through Patten, while only six officers will be made available to the local commander.

In the Down district, the number of offences rose by more than 500, an increase of 12 per cent., while the detection rate has dropped from 27 to 17.5 per cent. In the Ards district, the number of crimes has also risen by more than 500 to 5,112, an increase of 11 per cent., with the detection rate dropping to 24 per cent.

In Newtownards recently, the proprietor of a local petrol station that had been robbed on several occasions contacted the police regarding the suspicious activity of a car in the vicinity and of a number of youths who had come into his shop. The police confirmed that the car had been stolen and the shopkeeper decided to close early for fear of being robbed again. He asked the local police if they would send a car to patrol the area while he removed the day's takings, but was refused as the only car on patrol was dealing with an incident and there was insufficient manpower in the station to send officers to the area. That petrol station is just 400 m from the police station.

It has been highlighted in the provincial press in recent days that overall confidence in policing is declining, with approval figures decreasing by 3 per cent. to 66 per cent.

A recent development in Killyleagh witnessed a number of individuals obtain housing in the town after they had allegedly been forced out of Downpatrick by paramilitaries, accused of antisocial behaviour. What was described as a mini crime wave commenced in the town, and it was attributed to the individuals in question. Pensioners were attacked and robbed in their homes, cars were damaged, stolen and burnt out, yet the police were unable to apprehend the culprits. Two local residents then took it upon themselves to approach those being accused of the trouble and were subsequently charged with assault and ordered by the courts to stay out of the town in which they both lived and worked. A petition was subsequently organised and several thousand signatures were put to it requesting that the two residents be allowed back into their home town. Those who signed the petition were not, as one might expect, the supporters of paramilitaries or vigilantes but respectable people from Killyleagh whose patience with the criminals had run out and whose confidence in the police's ability to defend them had plummeted. I am sure that the House will agree that that is a most worrying development.

On the basis of the unparalleled rise in non-terrorist crime alone, there is a rock-solid argument for increasing policing resources in my constituency. Problems being experienced elsewhere in Northern Ireland are having a direct and negative effect on the ability of the police in my constituency to do their job properly. It cannot be denied that since the inception of Patten and the destruction of the RUC morale within the ranks of police officers in Strangford has sunk to an all-time low.

The Government need to wake up to the fact that we do not have the peace that was the working assumption on which the Patten commission relied when making its manpower recommendations. It is difficult to understand how the police could ever be expected to operate effectively when they are coping in non-peace circumstances with a manpower level below that recommended for peacetime.

That has compounded the problem for officers dealing with local policing issues in Strangford. The continuing threat of terrorist violence across the Province, and the almost constant street conflict in Belfast that has been stoked up by IRA-Sinn Fein, have necessitated the diversion of Strangford police resources to the conflict areas. In Castlereagh, for example, during the period from June 2001 to January 2002, 20 per cent. of the district's resources had to be transferred to other areas in Northern Ireland to assist in tackling street violence. That represented approximately 30 officers being taken every day out of the area in which they were based, to address paramilitary orchestrated violence.

The levels of violence outside my area are having a deeply negative impact on the Police Service's ability to maintain law and order in my constituency. Street violence has now reached a level not witnessed since the height of the troubles in the mid-1970s. According to official police records in 2001, almost 1,600 people were injured as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland. There were 353 shooting incidents, more than 350 bombing incidents, 332 incidents of paramilitary-style punishment attacks, and 107 firearms and explosives finds.

In the first eight months of this year, 1,248 attacks against the police have been logged; more than 1,100 missiles have been thrown at police officers; 400 police officers have been injured, and more than 3 million hours of overtime have been clocked up by serving officers in an attempt to provide an acceptable level of security. At the same time, there have been 244 shooting incidents, 153 bombing attacks and 244 paramilitary-style attacks.

From 1998, when the Belfast agreement was signed, more than 100 people have been killed as a direct result of the security situation in Northern Ireland, and more than 6,000 people have been injured. There have been almost 1,500 shootings and more than 1,000 incidents involving bombs and incendiaries. More than 1,250 people have been subjected to paramilitary-style assault, more than 1,300 persons have been charged with terrorist and serious public order offences, and there have been more than 1,400 firearms and explosives finds.

The fact is that the police are attempting to provide security for the law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland with the resources set for policing a peaceful society, while being forced to continue the war against terrorism. It is only logical, and inevitable, when a police service is treated in such a shoddy and unprofessional manner, that crime will rocket as resources plunge. Of course, letting more than 900 convicted thugs out of jail has hardly had a positive impact on the lives of people in communities across Northern Ireland. Communities are even more polarised, and even more under the control of paramilitary organisations. The fact of the matter is that the officer on the street knows that the implementation of Patten is to blame for the crisis in policing.

After 15 months of continuous street disorder, and with the threat from both republican and loyalist paramilitary groups running at the highest level for five years, the collective pressure on resources has left "little to deliver ordinary day-to-day policing".

So said acting Chief Constable Colin Cramphorn on 22 August this year. He went on to say:

> "In many areas we are simply responding to emergency calls and little else."

[Mrs. Iris Robinson]

In the year to July 2002, more than 730 officers were injured, while the impact of working excessive hours has provided little respite for officers.

As Colin Cramphorn stated:

"Such levels of activity cannot be sustained indefinitely."

In east Belfast, the number of officers required has doubled because of paramilitary activity and street violence. Assistant Chief Constable Alan McQuillan stated on 30 August that he envisaged no end to that activity. The new Chief Constable, Hugh Orde, should never be forced into a position of grovelling for resources to prevent his force from witnessing complete meltdown.

Any suggestion that the 1,949 full-time reserve should be stood down is patent madness. Effective policing must be promoted above political expediency. It is distressing that at a time when the Government should be retreating from Patten to provide improved policing, they are planning further concessions to accommodate the IRA's insatiable demands. The drive to reduce manpower has meant that the force has been stretched to breaking point. At the same time, officers are tied up under a mountain of bureaucracy generated by the ombudsman, the oversight commissioner and the so-called Human Rights Commission, and in implementing the 190 Patten recommendations. Meanwhile, the IRA continues to be pandered to and its nefarious activities go on unabated.

The oversight commissioner, Mr. Tom Constantine, has warned that violence may wreck policing reform. Why should such politically motivated reform be a priority? Should not the provision of effective policing be the Government's primary aim? Should not the primary objective of policing in any modern liberal democracy be maintaining law and order and challenging criminals and terrorists?

In closing, three matters are clear. First, the retention of the full-time reserve is crucial to avoid a security meltdown. Secondly, police recruitment policy must be reviewed. It is vital that Hugh Orde apply to the Secretary of State for a suspension of the 50:50 recruitment rule. Many hundreds of applicants from a Protestant background have been denied a place in the force on account of their religion and nothing else. An increase in intimidation of Roman Catholic officers, and a decrease in the applications from Roman Catholics are generating a recruitment crisis. There have been insufficient acceptable Roman Catholic recruits to fulfil the requirements. The 50:50 rule means that the number cannot be made up with Protestants because they are capped at the level of Catholics who enter. The result is an unacceptable overall shortfall of officers.

Thirdly, the programme of civilianisation of posts has run aground. That policy has also been severely undermined by the 50:50 rule. It was estimated that the programme might free as many as 300 officers for other duties, but only 29 Roman Catholics have applied for those civilian positions.

Unless the Northern Ireland Office takes its head out of the sand on the genuine problems that the police face in Northern Ireland, matters will continue to deteriorate. It also appears certain that the redeployment of resources to other districts leaves my constituency prey to criminals and vulnerable to attack.

I urge the Minister to ensure that the funding and other necessary resources are made available to the Chief Constable to reverse the predicament and avert catastrophic consequences.

7.23 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson) for choosing policing as the subject of our debate. She raised many issues on policing in general, as well as specifically in the Strangford area. Although I cannot comment in depth on the circumstances in specific areas—the deployment of police resources is, of course, a matter for the Chief Constable—as Minister with responsibility for security, policing goes to the heart of my responsibilities. I welcome the opportunity to respond to some of the anxieties that she raised. I have only a short time, so I shall respond in greater depth in writing, if she is happy with that, after the debate when I have read the details in *Hansard*.

On the hon. Lady's general point about the overall effectiveness of the criminal justice system, I draw her attention to the law and order group that the Secretary of State has established, in which he meets the Attorney-General and Ministers in the Lord Chancellor's Department. They are advised and supported by the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland and the Chief Constable. We are examining every aspect of the criminal justice process to ensure that the process and management of the criminal justice system are as effective as we can make them.

The hon. Lady is right to talk about a sense of growing problems involving crime. She draws attention to concerns that we all share about the continuing security situation that is faced by the police and security forces in Northern Ireland. However, I would refute the main thrust of her argument, which is that the Belfast agreement is the cause of the current security situation in the Province. She would expect me to say that, but there are many issues on which we agree.

I argue that since the signing of the agreement, the overall security situation has improved. However, serious terrorist and public order challenges remain. The hon. Lady rightly quoted horrific statistics of shootings and bombings. Since the middle of May and throughout the summer months, there have been serious and sustained violent incidents in the Short Strand area in the constituency of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson).

There are still sporadic outbreaks of violence in the north of the city too. During the violence, police have been attacked with blast bombs, petrol bombs, acid bombs, bricks and other missiles. We must consider what sort of a mind makes acid or petrol bombs, and hands them out to teenagers to throw at police officers. The police face extremely serious problems. They have even come under live gunfire from both traditions. Since the beginning of the year, more than 600 police officers have been injured in north and east Belfast. Recently, the police and the Army established a high-profile presence on both sides of the community in east Belfast. It has brought a welcome degree of peace and calm to the area. However, the hon. Lady knows as well as I do that that can never be a permanent solution to the problems.

In Belfast, the police can call on up to seven level 1 and 10 level 2 tactical support groups. That is a total of 502 officers to be deployed in the Belfast area, at any one time to deal with public disorder. As has been the case throughout the troubles, military resources are deployed in support of the police. However, as the hon. Lady rightly says—she has drawn attention to the concerns expressed by Mr. Cramphorn, the then acting Chief Constable, in August—the demands that public order policing have placed on the service directly affect police capabilities elsewhere.

For our part, I assure the hon. Lady that the Government will continue to do everything that we can to create an environment in Northern Ireland where the need to commit such a level of resources is no longer necessary. It remains the responsibilities of others with influence in the community to do everything that they can to help us achieve that goal. On an occasion like this it is important to look to the past as we consider the current arrangements for policing.

I want to respond to the comments that the hon. Lady made several times in her contribution when she talked in general terms of what she described as the wanton destruction of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. As we look back, we must never forget that, over their history, the police in Northern Ireland have borne the brunt of a sustained and brutal terrorist assault. They have responded with gallantry and professionalism. They richly deserve the support and gratitude of all in Northern Ireland.

It is hard to believe that it is more than two years since Her Majesty the Queen visited Hillsborough to confer the honour of the George cross on the RUC. On that historic occasion, Her Majesty paid tribute to the police. She said that the award was:

"a singular acknowledgement of the gallantry and courage shown, the pain and suffering endured, and in all too many cases the ultimate sacrifice paid by members of the Constabulary during the past 30 years of terrorism and civil unrest."

The Government have now set up the RUC George Cross Foundation to ensure that those sacrifices and achievements are remembered and honoured in a dignified and appropriate manner.

I hope that the hon. Lady will allow me to respond to her other comments in writing.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Seven o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 15 October 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Transport of Animals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Jim Fitzpatrick.*]

9.30 am

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I thank everyone for attending, and thank Mr. Speaker's Office for ensuring that we get off to a good start after the recess with this rigorous 90-minute debate. It is particularly timely because the European Commission is soon to produce proposals, which are based on the requests of the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, for reforms to the transport of animals across the European Union. In addition—and not, I think, entirely co-incidentally—we have before us the RSPCA's report on the 39 steps that it believes must be taken if improvements are to be made within the trade.

I acknowledge the invaluable help that I have received from the RSPCA in preparing for the debate, as well as the help that I have received over the years from Compassion in World Farming. I declare an interest, as I am a long-standing member of that organisation.

First, I should like to consider whether the problem is worthy of our attention, because Parliament has a tendency to address any and every issue, regardless of whether parliamentary action is needed. In Westminster Hall debates, in particular, it is important to establish what priority should be given to an issue.

I shall refer to a recent study, made by the "Animal Angels" team associated with the RSPCA, of a journey from Spain to Italy that was made in July 2002, in which 300 sheep were transported. The journey lasted 220 hours, which is roughly 10 days. The route plan required under European regulations was systematically flouted. When the driver got to Venice, the RSPCA intervened because the animals had been on the road without being unloaded for 75 hours. After 85 hours, they were finally unloaded at Prosecco on the Italian-Slovenian border, but only after the RSPCA intervened and reported the driver to the police.

At that point, the sheep had been without food for more than four days. For more than three days they had been unable to rest. They were showing clear signs of physical and mental stress: they were frothing at the mouth, and showed other signs of stress that would be obvious to a veterinarian. One sheep was lying in agony, with its legs sticking out from the side of the lorry, where it had fallen, because it had been packed in so tightly. Many of the sheep had not been milked, and showed clear signs of mastitis.

The water supplies in Venice were empty, so it was not clear how long the animals had gone without water in temperatures of up to 40 deg centigrade, but they were desperate for water when they were seen. If the vehicle had not been stopped, the driver would have put his loaded vehicle on the ferry to Greece. That would have added a further 36 hours without water to the journey. At that time, we could see one dead sheep; it was likely that by the end of the journey there would have been many more. The death of animals during transport is a not-infrequent occurrence that worries the farming industry as much as anyone else. That driver drives every week, and one might ask what happened when the infringements were detected: the driver was taken to court and given a fine, and the sheep were allowed to continue their journey to Greece.

At the Italian port, the same crew overloaded two trucks with sheep on three tiers. The majority were not sheared and many were pregnant. They were in bad condition and breathing heavily with wide-open mouths. No vets were present at the port.

The temperature on the ferry was about 36 deg. Vets were present when the sheep arrived in Greece. They admitted that the trucks were overcrowded but the vehicles proceeded anyway because there was nowhere to unload the sheep. There was inadequate ventilation and a defective water system. Animals were dragged by their heads, horns, legs, tails and fleeces and there was severe overcrowding.

It might be said that that is an individual case and that hard cases make bad law. In practice, however, teams from the RSPCA and other organisations have made the same type of observations again and again.

The industry's scale is significant—5 million animals are transported every year. Until recently, live exports from Britain had been stopped because of the foot and mouth epidemic, and some of us felt that that was the only positive aspect to come from the epidemic. However, the exports have resumed, albeit on a smaller scale. Under the Government's interpretation of international law, it appears that it is not possible to ban them altogether. I think that the British public in general believe that maximum precautionary regulations and, indeed, a degree of excessive bureaucracy would be welcome. Ideally, every trip would have to be documented in a 100-page document in Serbo-Croat and submitted personally in the Falkland Islands. If that is not possible, we should at least attempt to ensure that every health and safety and welfare consideration is addressed and documented before any export takes place.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): We agree with the hon. Gentleman about the highest possible standards for exports. Does he agree that his broader point—that we must find ways of limiting the quantity of exports or, to use his words, abolishing it—would fall foul of two things? First, it would fall foul of the European free market. The whole point of being in the European Union is that we must trade with each other without restriction. Does he not understand that 1 million sheep and a quantity of other animals are exported from this country every year? If that were not the case, the domestic market would collapse and farmers who are already having a disastrous time would have an even worse time. Surely he understands the effect that any ban or restriction would have on the domestic market.

Dr. Palmer: In the real world, we can reach consensus. A ban is not possible in practice because of international trade law. We might disagree on the desirability of a ban but it will not happen. On the other hand, export

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conditions must be of the highest defensible welfare standards so that we can sleep easy in our beds about the trade. I accept the hon. Gentlemen's point that these matters are significant.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I was struck by my hon. Friend's point that the farming industry wishes to observe the highest standards. Does he accept that organisations such as the National Farmers Union have a preference for the export of meat rather than livestock, which brings back added value to the farmer, as a primary producer, and to this country's meat industry? The way forward is to try to ensure that a level playing field throughout Europe brings the standards of animal welfare throughout Europe to the levels for which we, in this country, have pressed.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his intervention. What he said is entirely correct.

I welcome the National Farmers Union's stance on this point, particularly with regard to pig farming. It is generally accepted that several aspects of pig farming in Britain have a higher standard of welfare than is prevalent in other European countries. Therefore, it would be in the interests of the British farming industry—as well as of the animals concerned—if we were to level up standards across Europe, rather than level them down.

Parts of the NFU's response to the European Commission's scientific committee were a bit depressing. It justified practices as diverse as the use of electric prods and, on commercial grounds, insurance to compensate transport firms that allow animals to die en route. The NFU should recognise that the public expect a balance to be struck on such matters. Nobody wishes to drive farmers out of business, and everybody accepts that our practices cannot be too different from those on the continent because of the competitive issue, but the British public are not prepared to support certain practices, such as the use of electric prods, even in the interests of smooth commercial operations. It is important for an industry not to become too separate from its consumers on such issues because, if that happens, the medium-term commercial backlash can be significant.

There is a widespread consensus on this issue in Britain. Most of us continue to eat meat but we do not wish it to be produced in grossly inhumane conditions, and most people accept that the implication of that is that the price of meat will be slightly higher. The long-term interests of the industry require that that consensus be respected.

That consensus is reflected in many other European Union countries, and it is important not to generalise too much about it. In the test votes in the Council of Ministers, there was a majority in favour of an eight-hour travel limit, but it was not a qualified majority. That majority consisted largely of what we think of as the northern tier of countries, with the exception of France and Ireland. However, there is also significant public concern in other European countries, and I understand that some of the countries that opposed a strict eight-hour limit will be open to discussion about a modified approach to the matter.

I wish to concentrate on three aspects of this issue: first, whether there should be any time limit at all on travel; secondly, whether conditions should be improved during travel; and thirdly, whether enforcements and penalties for infringements need to be toughened up. It is essential to distinguish between those three aspects of the debate, because if we were to blur them together by talking about enforcement while we are talking about the eight-hour limit, it would be easy to end up without any clear statement of what we want to achieve.

On the time limit, the European Commission obtained a report from the scientific committee on animal health and animal welfare—which we call SCAHAW—on the welfare of animals during transport, with details for horses, pigs, sheep and cattle. That was adopted on 11 March. It is a weighty document. The committee was chaired by Professor Donald Broom, who is a distinguished British scientist. The report has received a widespread—although not a universal—welcome as a serious document that addresses in detail the welfare issues for each species.

Despite the generous time allowed for this debate, It is not possible to summarise the entire report. However, on time limits, the report recommends inspection, food, watering and a six-hour pause after a journey of eight to12 hours—depending on species—followed by a maximum of one further eight to 12-hour stretch. That does not go as far as the majority on the Council of Ministers would have liked. It was hoping for an eight-hour limit, as was the European Parliament, and such a limit was also strongly endorsed by the RSPCA among its recommendations.

In the real world, we must recognise that negotiations take place in the Council of Ministers and that we will not achieve everything that we wish for. However, given the wish of the majority of Council members and the strong views expressed in the European Parliament, I hope that the Minister will assure us that Britain will be among the countries pressing for a reasonable limit within the eight to 12-hour range for the great majority of animals. We must rely on the Minister's famous negotiating skills to get the best possible deal, but I hope that this debate will reflect a consensus among hon. Members that our starting position should be the eight-hour limit advocated in the original Council of Ministers debate.

On the question of conditions during travel, the European Commission published a report in December 2000 that openly admitted the failure of the present transport directive to protect the welfare of animals, and the Commission agrees the need for new regulation. The first recommendation in the RSPCA report is that the definition of journey time should be from when the first animal is loaded to when the last animal is unloaded. The SCAHAW report endorses that definition because, should we adopt a less precise one, less scrupulous operators may take longer to transport animals in practice.

Secondly, the RSPCA recommends a maximum journey time of eight hours for farm animals intended for slaughter and that all farm animals must be slaughtered as close as possible to where they were reared. We are all aware of the problem surrounding the closure of small slaughterhouses, and have discussed reasons for the closures in several parliamentary

debates. In discussions about common agricultural policy reform, there should be encouragements set out for farms and slaughterhouses in the form of subsidies. Subsidies that are currently available for intensive production should be available instead to encourage a high degree of animal welfare on farms and in processing procedures. We must recreate the market for local slaughterhouses to encourage their return. We are beyond the point at which the Government can direct that local slaughterhouses be reopened, but we must reach the point at which it is commercially sensible to do so with defensible animal welfare standards.

Mr. Gray: One slaughterhouse closes every 10 days under Labour. Most of the reason for that is nothing to do with the market. There is plenty of market, and farmers would take their animals to local slaughterhouses. They are closing because they cannot face the heavy burden of regulation that weighs on them and the cost of implementing it. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should lighten the regulation on local slaughterhouses if they want them to continue?

Dr. Palmer: No. The regulation that we are discussing has not been imposed frivolously or randomly, but partly on welfare grounds and partly to discourage the spread of disease. The way forward is not to say that small slaughterhouses do not have to fulfil the conditions that large slaughterhouses do. That would be a market-distorting mechanism and would be deeply resented by other sections of the industry.

What is needed is support. The CAP negotiations may offer a basis for support for small slaughterhouses so that they can reach the standards that we want them to attain. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, on reflection, would not endorse the concept that small slaughterhouses should have lower standards than large ones. We could discuss whether each regulation was ideal, but that might go beyond our debate. He surely accepts the principle that small and large slaughterhouses should both have high standards.

Mr. Gray: Of course I accept that. My point was that both types of slaughterhouse are heavily over-regulated by the Government. For example, what does the hon. Gentleman think about the pith regulations?

Dr. Palmer: The hon. Gentleman goes beyond my knowledge of detailed slaughterhouse regulation, and beyond our debate. I shall restrict myself to arguing the general principle that small slaughterhouses should have the same high welfare and commercial standards as large ones.

Another significant problem is the attitude of the main retail or wholesale purchasers. Some of the large retail chains and supermarkets insist on the use of slaughterhouses that may be in different parts of the country from the farms. That is an anti-competitive practice, and it would help if the Government considered ways to discourage it. It has contributed significantly to a decline in small slaughterhouses.

I shall return to the recommendations of the RSPCA. The third reads:

"A maximum total journey time of eight hours must be imposed for farm animals intended for further fattening. It should not be necessary for animals to travel long distances merely to complete the finishing stage of production. 'Further fattening animals' must be specifically defined within the Directive in a way that will avoid abuse of the system."

It is widely recognised that it is easy for transporters to maintain that animals are transported for one purpose, but for the animals then to be re-transported for another purpose when they arrive. An audit trail needs to be applied to ensure that the intention of the European Union and the Government on the issue is not subverted.

The fourth RSPCA recommendation reads:

"Breeding animals may travel for a total maximum journey time of over eight hours, but only if stringent on-board conditions...are maintained throughout the journey."

There is clearly potential for negotiations with some countries that opposed the eight-hour limit at the test votes at the Council of Ministers. I am grateful to the RSPCA for its brief on the position of each country in those discussions. Although some countries say that the regulations are fine, others concede that they may need to be improved; I hope that they will agree that if journey times for breeding animals are to be longer, the conditions should be right.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this subject in Westminster Hall. We are discussing the regulations and the opinions of various European countries. Does he have any idea of the views of those countries that are about to join the European Union? Now seems an ideal time to try to sort out such important matters.

Dr. Palmer: I discussed that matter with the RSPCA, which has contacts throughout Europe—both inside and outside the European Union. Somewhat to my surprise, it reports that the attitude of many of the new countries planning to join the EU is quite positive on animal welfare in general, and particularly so on this subject. I say that I was surprised because Poland and Hungary have large farming interests and we might have expected them to be sceptical. I rely on the briefing that I have been given, but it seems that we will not be flying in the face of the wishes of the majority of applicant countries if we strengthen the rules.

The strongest resistance comes not from the applicant countries but from countries on the periphery of Europe that have significant trade with the rest of Europe. I think particularly of Italy, which says that a large part of its trade involves long-distance transport because the country is such a long way from its markets. That applies less to Poland, which has substantial exports to Germany and would hope greatly to increase them but which would not have a problem in meeting an eight-hour limit. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that this is one of numerous issues that we should try to sort out before we have 25 countries attempting to reach agreement.

The RSPCA next proposes that animals should not start a new journey without a standstill period long enough to ensure effective disease control—both to reduce the risk of spreading disease and for welfare reasons. The report of the European Commission Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare—the SCAHAW report—recommends a 48-hour period between the end of one journey and the start of the next, during which time the animals should get

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rest and recuperation, and food and water. The RSPCA notes, however, that that would not be enough to act as an effective disease control measure.

The sixth recommendation in the "39 Steps" report is:

"Ways of encouraging and promoting the development and use of more local abattoirs and mobile slaughterhouses . . . in order to minimize journey times to slaughter. For example, the charges for meat hygiene inspections should be on a headage (throughput) basis rather than a set daily charge, to ensure smaller premises are not unfairly disadvantaged."

I believe that the Government could take action on that without having to wait for our European partners.

The seventh recommendation of the RSPCA report states:

"Forced mechanical ventilation must be compulsory in all vehicles authorized to transport farm animals over eight hours, so that adequate ventilation can be ensured when the vehicle is stationary, and under all conditions."

Indeed, it should be compulsory to use the ventilation when the vehicle is stationary. As the NFU pointed out, the problem is that existing vehicles may not meet such standards. As always, however, there is scope for negotiation on transitional arrangements to ensure that the industry is not unreasonably disadvantaged. There is a balance to be had in such matters. We hope that such regulations will be introduced within the next few years, because the average lifespan of a lorry is not normally more than five years, and it should be possible to introduce improved regulations for lorry design within that period.

The eighth recommendation reads:

"The SCAHAW report's recommended higher, more detailed space allowance figures must be implemented, and if travel beyond eight hours is permitted"—

for instance, for breeding animals—

"greater floor space allowances as given by the formula for longer journeys. . .must be provided to allow all animals access to feeders and drinkers during rest stops."

The SCAHAW report details the way in which various species react differently to long journeys. Animals such as cattle normally stand during journeys, but they will eventually sink to a vehicle's floor through exhaustion. That is an argument for shorter journeys, but it also means that in so far as we permit longer journeys we should allow for both standing and sitting postures, and ensure access to water.

The ninth recommendation reads:

"Increased headroom must be provided, as recommended by the SCAHAW report".

The NFU accepts that that is reasonable and should not lead to significant problems.

Recommendation 10, which is uncontroversial, states:

"Sufficient feed and water must be provided, to ensure all animals can eat and drink enough to prevent hunger and thirst in transit."

The SCAHAW report contains detailed recommendations on the amount of fasting that should take place before journeys to ensure that animals do not suffer travel sickness, and recommends that excessive fasting should be avoided because it may cause suffering.

Recommendation 11 states:

"Sufficient amounts of appropriate bedding must be provided, to allow the species in question to lie comfortably, and which remains dry on the surface for the duration of travel."

That would reduce the risk of injury if an animal were to fall in transit. I stress that we are talking about not only animal welfare but the quality of meat. It is well documented that meat quality is affected when animals are transported in unpleasant conditions, a case in which animal welfare and commercial interests are overlapping.

Recommendation 12, which relates to an earlier point, states that the

"Council should establish as a matter of urgency a common position on the Commission's proposal to improve the construction and design of livestock vehicles".

Recommendation 13 reads:

"It must be possible to carry out inspections of each individual animal during the journey and to take appropriate remedial action".

The NFU's response to the SCAHAW report makes the reasonable point that we need a precise definition of "inspection". Are we talking about peering through the slats on the side of a lorry or are we talking about examining every animal? Inspections need to be properly defined to inspire confidence in the process. It would be insufficient for a driver to say, "I had a look and everything seemed to be all right."

We need a defined process that haulage companies, which I do not want to demonise, must fulfil. We need to accept that the majority of them want to operate their businesses decently and require well-defined regulations that say what they mean. All of us who have worked in industry will be familiar with the dilemma that although one can attempt to fulfil every regulation in good faith, a campaign group can still attack a real or perceived violation of a regulation that was not clear, or was not there in the first place. We must define what we expect of haulage companies, enforce the rules and punish those who break them, but we should not demonise the companies themselves. Indeed, companies that try to comply with the terms of the regulations are being undermined by those who try to subvert them.

Recommendation 14 states:

"Ramps that animals use during loading and unloading must have non-slippery surfaces, including means of ensuring easy ascent/descent without slipping—for example foot battens at intervals appropriate to the age/species. They must also have solid sides and the maximum gradient of ramps must be suitable for the species concerned."

In principle, that is non-controversial, as long as a reasonable transition period is allowed so that new lorries can be introduced and the old ones phased out. We need to ensure that the rules are framed carefully, and unambiguously defined.

On a point of parliamentary procedure, I understand that there will be responses only from the Front Benches. However, if any Back Benchers present wish to intervene, I will be pleased if they restrain me.

Recommendation 15 reads:

"Very young animals should not be transported at all. Scientific evidence suggests calves under four weeks old should not be transported/marketed, due to the acute and chronic effects on their welfare, including health. Similar concerns apply to young

animals of other species such as piglets and lambs under four weeks old. Therefore, if such animals are to be transported, special conditions—for example, a shorter journey time—must apply."

There will be particularly strong public support in Britain for that proposal. The principle that an animal is entitled to a few weeks of life before it is subjected to extreme stress is widely accepted and if, as appears to be the case, these young animals are more than others liable to respond badly to extensive travel, separate regulations are needed.

Recommendation 16 provides:

"Animals that have previously lived in different pens must not be mixed prior to transport, while on the transport vehicle, or while in pre-slaughter housing."

That is partly because of disease and partly to discourage fighting during the journey. The paragraph continues:

"Vehicles should have moveable pen dividers to adjust to pen size appropriately, so that . . . animals reared together are kept in contact with each other."

Animals reared separately should be kept separately.

Many people will be surprised that it is necessary to make the proposals in recommendation 17, which states:

"During loading and unloading a twitch must not be used on horses or any other species, sheep must not be grasped or lifted by their wool, farm animals must not be beaten, poked with a stick or kicked, sticks must not be used on sensitive areas such as the eyes, mouth, ano-genital regions or belly; tails or ears must not be twisted; animals must not be dragged by limbs or other parts of the body and the use of electric goads must not be permitted."

Many people will be pretty shocked to hear that all those practices occur on a regular basis. The NFU's response is that while it has reservations about the electric goad, which it believes is necessary in some circumstances, it does not dispute that it is a widespread, although bad, practice to lift sheep by the fleece and that extensive education is needed to change farmers' habits in that respect in Britain and overseas.

I will return later to recommendation 18, which states:

"Journey time and rest periods must be properly enforced by the competent authorities."

Recommendation 19 reads:

"The so-called route plan for transporters must be improved and made easier to enforce, so transporters can complete the forms showing where they have departed from the plan—

which will sometimes happen—

"and why."

The Commission needs to impose meaningful sanctions on member states if the approved route plans do not provide the information that is required in the transport directive.

Recommendation 20 states:

"The Commission must encourage member states to harmonize their policies on penalties in the EU."

There is a slight tendency to smugness in northern Europe on this issue; we are not particularly exemplary in imposing our severe penalties.

Recommendation 21 provides:

"Member states must present a report at least every 12 months to the Commission on the inspections that they have carried out, indicating in particular the frequency of inspections, the nature of any shortcomings and . . . the action taken to rectify problems".

That is a fairly routine matter within the EU, which follows most directives.

Recommendation 22 states:

"The Commission must present a detailed annual report to the Council and the European Parliament on the enforcement of the Directive."

In some instances we are treading on new territory. We must ensure that the directive is applied in practice and that unexpected problems, whether welfare or commercial, do not arise. It will be sensible to see a detailed annual report, certainly during the early years of implementation.

The RSPCA proposes in recommendation 23:

"The number of Food and Veterinary Office inspectors and inspections to verify implementations of the directive must be increased substantially."

I hope that the Minister will confirm that there is likely to be fairly broad consensus within the EU on that. It is clear from the debate that took place in the Council of Ministers that most countries accept that there are significant violations of even the current guidelines. That is indefensible.

As we know from debates on crime and other issues, a regulation or law that is not supervised or enforced is eventually treated with contempt. The farmers and the haulage companies that adhere to the regulations ultimately feel that they are mugs because they are undermined by those who get away with violating them. We have a duty to the commercial interests of the companies that fulfil regulations to ensure that those that do not are caught and penalised.

Recommendation 24 provides:

"The Commission must show a greater willingness to initiate and proceed with Treaty infringement proceedings against member states."

I predict that that point will not necessarily appear in the Council of Ministers recommendations, but I hope that the Commission will take note of it.

Recommendation 25 states:

"At places through which animals on long journeys regularly pass, member states of transit or destination must be required to adopt effective systems for checking they are being transported in accordance with route plans and the requirements of the Transport Directive."

I gave the example of transport from Spain to Greece with a stopover in Italy at a major ferry port to illustrate the problems that can arise if the recommendation is not fulfilled.

Recommendation 26 states:

"Member states must be legally obliged to provide suitable Border Inspection Posts...There must be a legal requirement that BIPS examine all route plans, rejecting any that are falsified."

Recommendation 27 reads:

"The Commission must require that any driver and staff of a livestock road vehicle holds a certificate of professional competence recognized by one of the member states, confirming that s/he has completed a training course for drivers of vehicles intended for the carriage of livestock—and been independently assessed for knowledge and competency."

That is important for reasons identified in the SCAHAW report. It notes that, although the most severe point of suffering is during the loading process, animals can suffer significantly during the journey if, for instance, the vehicle takes corners at high speed.

[Dr. Palmer]

In practice, an inspectorate cannot enforce measures to deal with that. Unless every vehicle is followed as it travels, that cannot be done. We can only ensure that drivers have been properly trained, so that they know what is expected of them—the vast majority would prefer to adhere to regulations—and what they need to do to avoid causing suffering to animals being transported. We should not underestimate the role of ignorance. Many people want to do the right thing, but do not know what that is.

Mr. Randall: Ensuring that suffering in transit is limited is of great importance, but I know from my experience of travelling on the Good Shepherd—the boat that travels between the mainland of Shetland and Fair Isle—that sheep are extremely poor sailors. I do not know whether they are still transported on that boat, but is the hon. Gentleman aware of anything that can be done to alleviate problems while sheep are on board ship?

Dr. Palmer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. The question of transport over sea passages is particularly important for Britain and Ireland, and is dealt with by an RSPCA recommendation, to which I shall return.

Recommendation 28 provides:

"The EU should end the payment of export refunds in respect of live animals and seek the establishment of binding international guidelines governing the treatment of live animals during long-distance transport."

There is a significant export from the EU to non-EU countries in north Africa and elsewhere but, as my right hon. Friend the Minister stressed, we should be promoting the meat trade rather than the live animal trade. Given the general commitment to reform the CAP, however shaky that may sometimes seem, this is a good opportunity to refocus the support for exports on meat rather than live animals. It is also important that the EU seeks to establish international guidelines that go beyond the EU, so that the commercial interests of its farmers are not undermined by cheaper and lower-welfare practices outside the EU.

Recommendation 29 states:

"Livestock markets must ensure record keeping for animal movements in and out of such establishments is stringent and enforced and all animals are individually identifiable."

After the foot and mouth outbreak, we do not need to be told what the risk is if there is confusion about that, whether deliberate or accidental.

I hope that the industry and the Government will increasingly promote the use of electronic markets, so that the appropriate match between buyer and seller can be achieved without the cumbersome, as well as problematic, transport of animals around the country. In this electronic age, it should be increasingly possible—I do not say "universally possible"—to achieve commercial objectives without the physical transport of animals, just as it is possible to negotiate the buying and selling of other commercial property without moving it around the country.

Recommendation 30 relates to the point made by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). It states:

"The Commission must bring forward detailed proposals on the protection of animals during sea transport".

The RSPCA suggests that the sea crossing of animal transport vehicles on roll/on/roll/off ferries should not be permitted if winds of force 5 or above are likely, or if sea conditions are similar, for some other reason, to those produced by such winds. That SCAFAW recommendation was rejected by the NFU, which argues that the rule is too general, and that some boats can cope with high winds, but others cannot. There is therefore a need to consider boats individually. I am not sure that SCAFAW's suggestion does the ferry operators and transporters any favours: an individual assessment would have to be made each time, and it would not be certain from studying the weather forecast each morning that one would be allowed to travel. One could turn up at the ferry port and find that the ferry was of a particular construction unsuitable for force 5 winds. There is a strong case for a specific ruling, rather than leaving the area fuzzy and to the judgment of a port official.

Recommendation 31 is that the European Union should agree additional specific detailed measures for the protection of horses during transport. The SCAFAW report identifies significant issues that relate specifically to horses. These issues are widely accepted in Britain because of the transport of horses of very high quality for racing and other purposes such as—dare I say it—fox hunting.

Recommendation 32 is that an official veterinarian with appropriate additional training and understanding of their role must supervise the loading of all animals to be transported for more than eight hours. The principle is that it is especially important that the conditions are optimal if it is decided that some or all animals may be transported for longer periods. I was disappointed that the NFU resisted that point. It is intuitively clear that the degree of inspection and control can be less for a short journey than if a major journey is about to be undertaken.

Recommendation 33 is that the Commission must provide a new definition of "fitness to travel" that includes the provision that no animal is fit to travel unless it can stand unaided and vary the weight on each of its legs when walking.

Recommendation 34 is that additional species-specific rules have been provided for the transport of the thousands of non-human primates that are imported over long distances from overseas breeding centres for use in biomedical research. Currently, there are no maximum times for journeys. We also need maximum intervals between the times at which food and water are provided.

Recommendation 35 concerns the need for improved provisions for the transport of poultry. It follows the publication of a SCAFAW report on the welfare requirements of poultry, which are not addressed in detail in the current report.

Recommendation 36 states that specific provisions for companion animals, such as dogs and cats, should be provided at a future date.

Recommendation 37, which will also have widespread support among the British public, is that the transport of heavily pregnant animals should be

avoided. It should never take place during a period at least equal to 10 per cent. of the gestation period before giving birth, nor for at least one week following birth.

Recommendation 38 is that it should be prohibited to insure farm animals transported for slaughter and further fattening against mortality because of injury or poor meat quality. That is a SCAFAW recommendation, because if it is possible to insure against the consequences of bad transport, it will be in the commercial interests of some companies in some instances to circumvent the regulations. We must do everything we can to ensure that it is against the commercial interests of companies to have poor welfare conditions.

The final RSPCA recommendation is that the EU must consider introducing a requirement for all livestock vehicles transporting animals for more than eight hours to be linked to Galileo–the navigation positioning system–to help to police and enforce the regulations.

Mr. Gray: That is all very well, but is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Galileo system has not been designed yet, that it will require the launch of several satellites and that it may not be introduced for 10 or 20 years? I hope that the rest of the RSPCA report is more accurately and sensibly based than that recommendation.

Dr. Palmer: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I believe that he exaggerates the difficulties with Galileo, but time will tell. Existing satellite systems run by the Americans can be used in the interim, and then Galileo will offer a more precise measurement, which I accept is perhaps not necessary in this instance. I accept his point that the system can be implemented only as it becomes technically feasible.

As I mentioned earlier, Britain is not as fine an example in enforcement and penalties as we might wish. In a case last year, JSR Healthbred Pigs and Chris Waite Hauliers admitted to providing false information on journey plans and violating the law deliberately. What happened to them? The pig farm was fined £1,500 costs and £500 for the offence, and the haulage company was fined £500 and ordered to pay £500 costs.

Those are derisory sums. As a business man, if I were not concerned with the issue, thought that the likelihood of being caught were not that high, and knew that, if I were caught I would have to pay perhaps only £1,000, I might be willing to take that risk. We need to avoid that situation and ensure that it is a severe commercial risk for a company to violate the regulations. It is a question of respect for the law, and there is no point in legislating unless the penalties are commensurate with the gravity of the offence, especially for deliberate [illegible]on. Indeed, any deliberate conspiracy to circumvent the regulations should be a criminal offence.

Other campaigners and I are seeking some assurances from the Minister. First, will the Government give the strongest possible push in the European Council for the principle of a journey limit, even if compromises have to be made on the detail? Once the principle is established, we can make further progress, but we need to reach that bridgehead. The positive vote in the European Council gives us hope that it may be possible, with suitable compromises on detail, to achieve that principle.

Secondly, will the Minister commit to the strongest possible implementation of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare recommendations and the additional points in the RSPCA plan? Thirdly, will the Government work for the transfer of CAP subsidies from intensive farming to animal welfare? It should be possible to reassure countries that are concerned about their farming interests that we are seeking not to undermine their farms, but to reorient them to the standards that we expect in Britain. Fourthly, will the Government work for much stricter enforcement and, in particular, more commercially threatening penalties and criminal charges for active conspiracy to circumvent the law?

I am proud of Britain's record in supporting improvements, and I hope that we will join our allies in the European Union to lead the way forward. I apologise to hon. Members for taking so much time on the issue, which, despite today's light attendance, due to the scheduling of the debate, has widespread support throughout Britain. I hope that the Minister will press ahead with the policy.

10.29 am

Matthew Green (Ludlow): I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) secured this debate and I welcome the RSPCA's report, which will help to continue the debate. We need to reduce and phase out live animal exports, but we must do so in a balanced way that will not harm the agricultural industry or the British economy.

There are many clear arguments for reducing live exports and increasing carcase exports. Many Liberal Democrats sympathise with and support good animal welfare, which the hon. Member for Broxtowe has pressed at great length, but the costs to industry are considerable. Exporting animals means a cost to the farmer, which would not apply to shorter distances; and transporting animals also has environmental costs. Generally, the shorter the distance, the less need for road haulage. Local slaughterhouses would benefit from a greater emphasis on carcase export. Evidence suggests that animals slaughtered after longer journeys produce a lower quality of meat on the shelves—a consumer issue. Finally, disease control is a factor. If the distance over which animals are transported is reduced, the likely spread of foot and mouth or other communicable diseases is further reduced—an issue fresh in our minds.

We should recognise that only about 10 to 15 per cent. of meat exports are live and that some export is not for slaughter. Export for restocking or breeding purposes is always a possibility. New methods are under consideration—in respect of breeding, the transportation of embryos or semen, for example—but we cannot escape the fact that for breeding purposes we shall have to transport animals at different times. Transport within the UK will always be a necessity: all parts of the country cannot be used to produce fat lambs or fat cattle, for example. The upland areas of Wales and the Welsh Marches classically produce light lambs and cattle, which are sold as store animals and are sent off to the midlands for fattening. We may not be talking about long journeys in that respect, but the need to transport live animals—and not only to the slaughterhouse—will always apply. The idea that we can do everything on one large farm and ship straight to the slaughterhouse will never be a practical possibility.

[Matthew Green]

We must rule out the closure of livestock markets, which perform a necessary function in the sale of both slaughter and store animals.

Dr. Palmer: That may be true, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that the exchange of information by electronic means may in the longer term reduce the necessity to transport animals from market to market?

Matthew Green: I accept that the need to transport animals to livestock markets may reduce, but I cannot imagine that there will ever be a time when livestock markets are not needed. We have to accept the permanent need for livestock markets. In the past year or two, some people have suggested that it would be possible to close all livestock markets. Frankly, that is not a possibility, and I hope that the Minister will make it clear that the Government understand that.

The hon. Gentleman is particularly interested in live exports. If we are to phase them out, we need Europe-wide action; action by the UK alone has clearly been ruled out. Reforming the CAP gives us an opportunity to move—entirely, I hope—from production-based subsidies to land management-based subsidies. Some of the incentives that the system provides for live exports would then disappear, which would be welcome, not least because we need to move to land management-based subsidies for other reasons.

I hope that the EU Commission will study and change the EU transport directive and implement some of the measures raised in the recent European Parliament report. I shall mention some of the specifics later.

Overall, there must be better policing at the European level. We cannot accept a situation in which standards are enforced in some countries but not in others. Steps must be taken at the European level; it would be counterproductive for our industry if Britain took unilateral action.

The number of local, smaller slaughterhouses has been declining since before the Labour Government's period in office. There are several reasons for that, and we have touched on regulation. Another reason is the buying methods of the bigger multiples, and no one has really got to grips with the impact of their purchasing arrangements. Unfortunately, market forces have also driven the problem.

Having more local slaughterhouses offers huge advantages, but restoring them will probably require direct support. Action will also be needed to reform the meat hygiene regulations and to put them on a headage basis rather than on a flat-rate basis, which clearly discriminates against small slaughterhouses. To restore some of those slaughterhouses, we may have to discriminate in favour of them rather than against them.

If we are to phase out live animal exports, we must consider the possibility of more UK-produced meat being consumed in the UK. The knock-on effect may be a reduction in the amount of meat imported into this country. If we are to seek higher standards in the movement of animals, we must ensure that imported livestock is reared and transported according to the standards that we expect in this country. I hope that the Minister will deal with that.

I want now to touch on some of the European Parliament's proposals, which, as we heard, relate to time. However, they also talk about a distance regulation, which is slightly odd, given that it is time that matters, not the distance that an animal is transported.

On the more specific issues, the National Farmers Union is genuinely concerned that the request for the continuous feeding of animals during journeys will probably never be achievable.

Another issue is labelling. At present, we label animals where they are slaughtered, not where they start. If there was progress on that issue, I think that we would see a reduction in the movement of animals.

Finally, many of the proposals do not differentiate between different species. More work must be done. The needs of cattle are different from those of sheep, but there is a tendency to treat all livestock identically; we should be more species specific.

10.40 am

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I shall seek to be brief because I am keen to hear the Minister's response. Hon. Members often aim to be brief, but are not. I shall try to stick to my word, and if the Minister gives me a nod at the right moment, I shall happily curtail my remarks even if it means missing out some of the best bits.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) on his well-balanced and sensible approach to an issue that can generate great passion on both side of the animal welfare debate. All good men and true in the United Kingdom are in agreement about the desirability of reducing distress to animals as much as possible, both during transport and when they are being slaughtered; they differ merely about how to do it.

I am not so happy with some of the terms used by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green), who seemed to suggest that it was desirable to move progressively towards the abolition of live animal exports. At one stage he even seemed to suggest the abolition or reduction of transport itself. That is not practical for two reasons.

Matthew Green: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

The first is that the law is clear. The European Union would not allow the abolition of the export of live animals even if we wished it. Secondly, as I said earlier, we export 1 million sheep as well as many other animals, and were that to be outlawed, there would be severe consequences for our farmers. While that might seem like a good idea to the hon. Gentleman's more anthropomorphist constituents, it is not possible. In fact, we should avoid anthropomorphism in the debate. Animals are not like human beings. Of course, we would not want to be herded together in a lorry and carted around for eight, 12 or 24 hours. Equally, we would not like to be left in a field in the pouring rain to be milked twice a day and fed a lot of hay. Animals are different and it is reasonable to accept that. I suspect that some of the more extreme animal rights activists think that animals are the same as we are; of course, they are not.

The Opposition supported the Labour Government's Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 because it was a perfectly sensible means of laying down the

conditions under which animals should be transported. Our problem is that the terms of that order are not satisfactorily reflected—certainly not policed—in the European Union and elsewhere. Can the Minister comment on how the Government intend to make sure that the high standards of transport that apply in this country will be applied across the European Union and beyond—for example, in the case of the occasional transport of live animals by sea to the middle east? We must be sure that our high standards will be applied, not least so that our hauliers and farmers are not put at a competitive disadvantage. That has happened in the pig industry—we apply hugely high standards in this country but they are not applied even as close as Calais, and the consequence of the difference is that our farmers are, absurdly, put out of business.

I should like the Minister to focus on the important matter of local abattoirs. We have lost 336, some 44 per cent. of the total, since the Government came to power. There are only 500 left in the United Kingdom, largely because of costs and regulations, some associated with foot and mouth disease. The Minister must find a way in which to cut both. Will he tell us when he will implement in full the proposals in the Maclean report of 2000, which will be of great help with regard to small local abattoirs?

Will the Minister also address briefly the matter of the export of live horses? The export from the UK of live horses for slaughter has been illegal for some time; it does not happen. Will he confirm that that will remain the case and that it will not interfere with the export of live horses for other purposes, as there are some important reasons for exporting horses—for example, for competitions and racing? Will he ensure that there is no increase in the export of live horses for slaughter? In particular, will he review the disgracefully interventionist and unnecessary provisions of the horse passport scheme, which will become compulsory from 31 December 2003? Will he confirm that the introduction of horse passports will not increase the amount of horseflesh from this country that goes for eating on the continent of Europe? If that were allowed to happen, there might be a presumption in favour of allowing the export of live horses for slaughter.

Had there been time, I should have liked to raise several other points, but the Opposition broadly welcome the regulations. Broadly speaking, we welcome the RSPCA's proposals, "39 Steps", which I read with interest and which were wonderfully described by the hon. Member for Broxtowe, but we do not accept all the proposals. I mentioned Galileo, for example—a daft proposal, which would not be possible. I should also like to know what is meant by beating. Of course, we do not want animals to be beaten to get them on to lorries, but anyone who has ever loaded an animal on to a lorry knows that a tap on the backside with a stick is perfectly sensible. We must not allow ourselves to be tempted down the politically correct avenue of saying that animals should not be treated in that way. I hope that the Minister will respond to those points, and I shall be happy to discuss the subject with him in more detail on another occasion.

10.46 am

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) on his well-informed and thoughtful contribution to the debate, as well as the hon. Members for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) and for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on their constructive contributions. My hon. Friend was right to focus on issues that go much wider than our responsibilities in the United Kingdom. He said that certain concerns were shared by the farming industry and animal welfare organisations, and following a conversation last night with one of the vice-presidents of the National Farmers Union I can confirm that that is the case.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who has played a leading role in promoting animal health and welfare matters, is at the Agriculture Council today, but I took the opportunity of discussing this subject with him at the weekend, and I hope that, in my response, I can cover most of the points that have been raised, albeit briefly.

The transport of animals, especially over long distances, generates strong feelings. Over the years, hon. Members have helped to push the issue up the political agenda, as have organisations such as the RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming. My hon. Friend focused on "39 Steps", which I recommend to hon. Members as essential reading, although unlike John Buchan's original, it may not grip the reader for hours into the night if selected as bedtime reading.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) rightly stressed the need for a balanced approach. We must deal with the issue in a practical way and ask what is necessary and useful in respect of practices that raise animal welfare concerns. The hon. Gentleman referred to the distance limit and stressed that time is more important. The proposal is eight hours or 500 km, which is an attempt to resolve the practical problems in remoter areas, where journeys by minor roads and greater distances extend journey times beyond those for producers who have easy access to motorways. It also addresses concerns about the uneven distribution of slaughterhouses.

The hon. Members for North Wiltshire and for Ludlow referred to the future of abattoirs. One of my first responsibilities as a city councillor in 1973 was as a member of the Cardiff abattoir working party, which included grappling with the impact of European requirements at that time, resulting from the decisions of a Conservative Government. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire referred to pithing. Destroying an animal's brain by use of a pithing rod after a captive bolt stunning has taken place was widely used on cattle in this country, but the Food Standards Agency recently introduced legislation to ban that practice on human health and safety grounds. The industry must clearly adapt some of its operating practices, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want us to play fast and loose with public health issues.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the Maclean task force, which was established to consider ways in which to reduce the impact on small and medium abattoirs of a move required by EU law to introduce full veterinary supervision in all abattoirs and cutting plants by 1 April 2001. It was clear that the move would result in substantial increases in costs in small and medium abattoirs and that, in consequence, some would be forced to close. As announced in the rural White Paper, the Departments responsible for agriculture in England, Wales and Scotland have provided the Food Standards

[Alun Michael]

Agency with £8.7 million for each of the next three years, from 2001-02 to 2003-04, to reduce the level of charges to small abattoirs. Since April 2000, the FSA has had responsibility for implementing European and domestic legislation on meat hygiene charges and other related matters.

We were pleased to award a grant to Humane Slaughter Services Ltd. to support the costs of a study of the feasibility of operating a mobile slaughter unit in central and southern England. That study has been completed and the company is now considering whether to go ahead with the development of a mobile unit.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the horse passport issue. I am happy to confirm that the move should not lead to an increase in exports of horses for slaughter. The exception is being made for the movement of horses involved in racing, for example. The horse passport proposals are widely supported by the industry.

I return to the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe, which are the main focus of the debate. The Government take his views seriously, and we have continued to state a preference for shorter journeys, but the United Kingdom cannot act alone in changing the rules for the transport of animals. All hon. Members who have participated in the debate have recognised that fact. We have acted in concert with other countries, because we are concerned about the bad practices leading to the cruelty to which my hon. Friend referred. In February, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary called for fewer live sheep exports and, in July, he called for the European Commission to introduce proposals to amend the current animal transport rules. In September, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke at the Agriculture Council, urging discussion on a general eight-hour maximum for journeys within Europe.

As my hon. Friend said, there have been some appalling instances of abuse of animals on long journeys on the continent. Failures in the current rules and their enforcement have been the source of many concerns identified by the Commission's report on the experiences of member states since current rules were implemented. Our policy has been to enforce the rules in this country fully and consistently and to encourage those on the continent to do the same. We want a level playing field based on the highest possible standards—that is why, during the agriculture debate in September, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State called for better monitoring of animal transport within the European Union. That would make a difference, because the monitoring of journeys is at present the responsibility of the member state through which the journey is made, which can lead to the inconsistencies to which my hon. Friend referred.

The problems identified by the Commission have led other member states to agree with us that changes and improvements must be made. During the Agriculture Council debate in September it became clear that progress must be made before we achieve a consensus on the extent of changes required on the length of journeys. There is deep division between EU member states that support reduced journey times and those that oppose any change in the current controls. The issue will not be a simple one to resolve, and voluntary organisations need to step up the pressure and the process of education of citizens throughout Europe. The Government are on their side, but some Governments are not. However some, as my hon. Friend suggested, are in favour of change.

We were disappointed to see live exports resumed this summer after almost 18 months of no trade, but we must remember, as hon. Members said, that that trade is legal and our role is to apply the rules scrupulously. One way in which the UK does so is to refuse to issue route plans to the continent if sheep are likely to be transported when the temperature is anticipated to reach more than 30 deg.

As a result of the foot and mouth disease outbreak, the European Union introduced new measures to control the movement of sheep through assembly centres and staging posts to minimise disease risk. Minimum residency and standstill periods must now be met before fattening and breeding sheep are eligible for export. Under EU rules, all categories of sheep may be assembled for export only at approved assembly centres, which must meet strict conditions and be under veterinary supervision. EU animal health rules also limit the time between sheep leaving their holding of origin in one member state and arriving at their destination in another member state.

In addition to those EU controls, we have reviewed national legislation and procedures relating to assembly centres. Earlier this year we introduced measures requiring assembly centres to have in place an operational agreement covering all aspects of biosecurity.

My hon. Friend referred at length to the "39 Steps" report, which we largely welcome. It is in four sections. The first refers to journey times and the Government agree with the points made in that section. I have already referred to the way in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took that forward at the September Agriculture Council.

The second section covers vehicle standards and is a little more complicated. We want to see the Commission's proposals for changes in the legislation before getting caught up in a lot of technical detail.

The third section covers enforcement. The UK already operates controls that are tighter in some cases than those proposed. For example, we require route plans to be returned within 15 days of completion of a journey. We can support measures to improve enforcement in particular if they can be brought forward by changes in procedures and without the need to change legislation.

The fourth section refers to miscellaneous items, the majority of which we support. One point of concern involves livestock markets, which are covered by UK legislation. That is something about which, as hon. Members suggested, we need to be careful because there are differences between practices in some continental countries and the UK. I hope that my hon. Friend will find it reassuring that we can, in general, respond positively to what is a useful document.

My hon. Friend referred to rough weather. The Government are concerned that livestock should not suffer by being transported by sea in conditions that may cause unnecessary suffering. The state veterinary

service staff have accompanied sailings in a variety of conditions up to and including winds of force 7 and 8 and in rough seas. They observed that sheep did not suffer as a result of those conditions in the circumstances referred to. Transporters must not carry animals if they may be caused unnecessary suffering when force 7 or greater winds or rough or worse seas are forecast. Dover staff discuss any scheduled sailings with the master of the vessel to ensure that he has satisfied himself that he can comply. If staff believe that the master intends to sail in weather that may cause unnecessary suffering, a notice can be issued to prevent sailing. In fact, no notices have had to be issued so far, but several sailings have been cancelled by the operators because of conditions and that sort of discussion.

My hon. Friend also referred to the handling of animals. It is already an offence under current EU rules to lift or drag an animal by its head, horns, legs, tail or fleece and to use excessive force, sticks or electrical prods other than in limited circumstances. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire referred to that. Improvements are a matter for training and enforcement and we have already touched on that.

While we support moves in Brussels to shorten journey times on animal welfare grounds, three matters must be borne in mind. First, short journeys do not automatically guarantee improved welfare. A short journey that is badly managed can be more harmful than a long journey that is properly planned and carried out. That point must be acknowledged. Secondly, the different requirements of the sport and breeding industry, where animals of high value are generally transported under excellent conditions, must be recognised. Thirdly, the impact of changes on livestock producers in remote areas such as the Scottish highlands and islands, and on farmers such as those in Wales who need to find outlets for light lambs, must be taken into account. I hope that I have managed to cover most of the points that have been raised. There is a need further to join up our work with that of local authorities—

Mr. Alan Hurst (in the Chair): Order.

Recycling

11 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): May I take the opportunity to welcome my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) to his Front-Bench post? I no longer have to be quite so kind to him as he is no longer the pairing Whip, but it makes sense to spare a few kind words for his hard work, in several guises, for our party; he was vice-chairman, as well as occupying a senior post in the Whips' Office. I know that he will enjoy what is no doubt an exciting new portfolio for him.

I also have a word of welcome for the Minister for Rural Affairs, who is earning his corn this morning by dealing with two consecutive debates. Earlier, I spoke with his private office, and I want to say at the outset that the idea behind the debate is not to be overly party political, but to make constructive points about recycling. One of the few privileges of Back-Bench duty in this place is the occasional luxury of introducing a debate on a pet subject. I am not unrealistic about the likelihood of changing the law with my words today, but I hope that we raise the profile of the issue. The debate provides me with a platform to express my views and an opportunity to put on record my concerns in relation to recycling.

Recycling household waste is a key topic, and I make no apology for devoting time to discussing it. When I was growing up in the 1970s—not all that long ago—Britain was considered to be the sick man of Europe. A more accurate tag for Britain today, despite the Deputy Prime Minister's recent protestations to the contrary in his Johannesburg speech, is the dirty man of Europe. Nowhere is that more apparent than in our somewhat risible record on recycling household waste.

I represent the most central of the United Kingdom's inner-city seats—the very constituency in which the debate is taking place. I therefore appreciate that my constituents, the throng who visit London daily and, dare I say it, all of us in the House are responsible for a significant amount of litter that is disposed of in central London. Similarly, I appreciate that the built-up nature of the district means that we do not suffer the blight of either a local landfill site or an incinerator in our midst. My call rapidly to increase the rate of recycling is therefore not based on narrow, constituency self-interest.

The sheer magnitude of the garbage problem is characterised by the horrifying statistic that, every hour of the day, people in this country throw away enough litter to fill one of the great landmarks of my constituency, the Royal Albert hall. That amounts to 100 million tonnes of litter each year, the overwhelming majority of which finds itself in a landfill site or an incinerator.

It does not have to be that way. England is way behind most of its European Union partners in the household recycling league. A few moments ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) told me that Denmark has an innovative scheme, similar to the old deposits for bottles, that applies to plastics as well as glass whereby a small deposit can be retrieved for bottles taken to a supermarket and placed in a recycling mound. Such an approach, using a carrot rather than a stick, would be welcomed in many parts of Europe.

[Mr. Mark Field]

Some 46 per cent. of German household waste is composted or recycled. The figure is a miserly 9.5 per cent. in the UK, and only Ireland, Italy and Greece have marginally worse records on household recycling. The much-derided EU—on this side of the House at least—has produced some sensible household waste targets. In the 25 years up to 2020, beginning in 1995, we are expected to reduce the amount of biodegradable household waste being sent to landfill sites to about 35 per cent. of the 1995 level. The interim target is a 25 per cent. reduction between 1995 and 2010. We are roughly halfway through that period, and it is fair to say that we have made only a negligible impact in reducing waste during the past seven years. We have a lot of catching up to do in the next two thirds of a decade.

One thing that always strikes me is that we must try to bring the issue down from sustainability in the broader sense, which may excite many of the experts in this field, to a basic level that will appeal to our constituents. I always find it remarkable that after I buy a cup of coffee at a local coffee bar—a Starbucks or a Coffee Republic, of which there are many in my constituency, as anyone who walks around the streets of Cities of London and Westminster knows—the receptacle will be thrown away. Some may be recycled, but the great majority are not. The reality is that that polystyrene cup ends up in a landfill site where it will probably take about 1,000 to 2,000 years to disintegrate fully. That cannot be a sustainable way of dealing with our waste in the years and decades ahead.

Many experts are already talking about the destructive enzymes that are developing beneath the oceans as huge amounts of indestructible plastic and chemical waste are dumped at sea. Likewise, the prospect of landfills becoming full is a pressing concern that all local authorities and national politicians must address. In my constituency, commercial recycling is as key in the war on waste as the household initiatives that have developed in recent years. If ever local and individual considerations should be a guide—thankfully, that is often the case in politics—it is in the matter of recycling, which is personal. It requires the individual to make an effort and a choice.

Leadership from politicians and others in environmental matters is vital, but it still comes down to us as consumers and residents to consider our actions. My experience is that success in recycling connects very strongly with a sense of community and belonging in one's immediate environment. For that reason, our throwaway culture in central London and in Britain as a whole is so depressing.

In the business world, whether offices, shops or factories, there seems to be much less enthusiasm to separate paper, plastic and glass than there is in homes. In one sense that is understandable, but, equally, we shall all face a somewhat doom-laden future if we do not start taking responsibility for how our actions affect the planet.

In Westminster, great initiatives among residents have been introduced in recent years. They have prompted a tremendous response, which I have perceived in my 16 months as the constituency MP. However, because of a uniquely high turnover of residents—almost a quarter of the current population are not likely to be living here in 12 months—keeping everyone up to the mark is a continuous and thankless task. In the City of Westminster as a whole, and no matter how hard the environmental and cleansing departments work, all of us, as members of the public, could achieve much more by being considerate with our waste.

I am a great paper user—I am sure that this applies to many of my colleagues—and I tend to write letters and to deal with most of my personal correspondence predominantly by mail rather than by e-mail, which is much more environmentally friendly. It is my preferred way, and I do not apologise for it. However, my paper usage is minuscule, compared with just one document that may arrive from any of an array of public bodies that eulogise on hot topics.

To be honest, for many years I felt guilty about not recycling either my office or household waste, so I decided to take a small lead when I was elected a Member of Parliament in June 2001. Let us face it, having rubbish hanging around in our kitchen at home for a little longer than we would normally like is slightly inconvenient, but if we fail to take a lead now, how many more landfill sites will have to be dug in the countryside? How many more industrial incinerators will we need in the decades ahead?

When all is said and done, the acts or omissions of one individual make relatively little difference to the torrent of trash being generated by people and businesses in this country. If the idea of filling the Royal Albert hall on an hourly basis is difficult to grasp, we should consider the matter in this way: each and every one of this country's 58 million citizens—let us settle on that figure, although we in the House are battling over the number of residents because of the census report—throws away about 20 times their average body weight in garbage each year. What happens to that endless tide of glass, metal, plastic, polystyrene and cardboard? Sadly, while the extent of our waste problem is new, the solutions are devastatingly prehistoric. In simple terms, we dispose of about 90 per cent. of our household and commercial waste, irrespective of its pollution level, by burying it in the ground or by burning it off at an extremely high temperature.

For some time, scientists have noticed a strong link between polluted landfill sites—about 300 in England and Wales contain the most hazardous industrial waste—and an array of birth defects. Last August, the *British Medical Journal* published findings from Imperial college, London, which is in my headquarters area, that raised doubts about not only the most heavily polluted industrial waste sites, but all 2,300 landfill sites in the UK. Apparently, babies born within a couple of kilometres of such a site are more likely to suffer congenital abnormalities than those born further afield. Given that roughly three quarters of the British population live in such close proximity to their nearest landfill site, and in the aftermath of the great scares over BSE, CJD and foot and mouth disease, I fear that public confidence in the reassurances of any Government, of any political colour, has now reached an all-time low. Despite such medical evidence and increasing public awareness of the potential hazards of industrial burial, the vast majority of UK household waste continues to be sent directly to such sites.

It would be unfair to characterise any Government, of any political colour, as having simply sat on their hands as the landfill problem became ever more pressing. My party, the Conservatives, introduced the landfill tax—the UK's first environmental tax—in 1996, but the first few years of its operation, other than a very modest Treasury windfall, have had little impact on its target. Anyone who dumps waste in a licensed landfill site is taxed at about £12 per tonne of biodegradable waste and £2 per tonne of non-biodegradable. Most commentators admit that such penalties provide virtually no disincentive to using burial. Even setting the tax at such derisory levels has given rise to a culture of non-compliance—some three fifths of local authorities report that illegal fly-tipping has increased since the introduction of the tax and much of it occurs on farm land, which has blighted many people in rural constituencies.

In March 2001, the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, in its paper "Delivering Sustainable Waste Management", attacked the inertia and low expectations that continue to characterise waste management in this country. It also criticised the Government's much-vaunted 2000 waste strategy as failing to provide real vision.

As ever, the crux of much of the new regulation is its enforcement. The hapless Environment Agency appears to be hopelessly overstretched and confesses that it is aware of cases in which illegal operators have opened sites, allegedly as construction sites, that are used for dumping contracted waste at levels below that of the landfill tax.

I understand that several leading lights in the waste disposal industry have been quoted as saying that millions of tonnes of material have been diverted in recent years to form the contours of golf courses, shopping complexes, sports grounds and housing estates. The Environment Agency seems to have little authority to license or inspect such sites, and we can hazard only a wild guess at the true level of such illegal operations. All too often, as I think the Minister can confirm, the regulations and disincentives in terms of fines are so derisory as to make little difference.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Does my hon. Friend agree that such activities could store up problems for the future? During the past generation, methane seeping from long-abandoned tips has caused fundamental problems in housing areas in several parts of the country, and the dangers that he describes as short-term have long-term implications as well.

Mr. Field: I thank my hon. Friend, who is quite right. I shall come to future issues—this is a long-term problem on which we must make an impact collectively, as politicians and as citizens of this country.

The EU has shown itself to be something of a trailblazer on landfill and recycling, and the European landfill directive has been incorporated in national law in this country. That legislation is designed to minimise the environmental impact of landfill, particularly the gas emissions mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). It also deals with surface and ground water pollution, and land contamination.

The most important domestic implication involves a ruling that the amount of biodegradable and municipal solid waste sent to landfill must be reduced in stages. That requires swift and decisive action if we are to meet our obligations. Effectively, we dispose of about only a fifth of the amount that Germany deals with through recycling rather than landfill or other means of disposal.

I am concerned that, all too often, the Labour Government's strategy for achieving landfill reductions can be described as somewhat cynical. Frequently, the claim is made that they are the greenest Government ever, but Britain ranks towards the bottom of the international recycling league among the developed nations and will continue to do so unless radical changes are made in the decades ahead. The Government seem to intend to fulfil their landfill requirement targets only by switching to the second most ecologically damaging option—incinerators. Not for nothing did the Select Committee, only 18 months ago, splutter at the lack of imagination, and planning without ambition, of the national waste strategy. Expert witnesses described the potentially catastrophic carcinogenic effect of large-scale incineration.

The Government have now revealed that they will fulfil their interim landfill directive targets by burning as much as a third of the country's rubbish in industrial incinerators, which will be the size of power stations by the end of the decade, but, between them, Ministers, civil servants and industry experts could not begin to agree how many large-scale incinerators would be needed to increase the number from 12, which we had up and running by the end of the 1990s. That augurs very badly for the battles ahead, not least with local interest groups, which are determined, perhaps understandably, to ensure that incinerators are not located in their back yards.

I understand that, only this summer, the Government were forced to admit that they were embroiled in long-standing legal and planning battles in a handful of the initial batch of new applications. Highly organised action groups in all corners of the country are determined to put paid to plan A for the Government's attempts to fulfil our international landfill obligations. The main trouble is that there is no plan B in place. I appreciate that, from the Government's perspective, they have something of a public relations disaster on their hands. In the past couple of years, there has been a shuffling of feet on the issue of incinerator sites, not least in view of the number of marginal Labour constituencies that would be directly affected by the outline proposals. In part, that may be an expression of the great electoral success of the Labour party rather than a direct criticism, but we need a more sensible strategy for siting incinerators.

It appears that the new strategy is not central Government's responsibility at all. In the perception and the reality of the localism that my party is trying to push forward, such matters must be devolved to the most local level, and the most local level is the individual consumer. I would like to see more power in the hands of local authorities and county councils in relation to recycling.

When all is said and done—a detailed disentanglement of the Government's complex statistics is required—it is clear that if there is to be any hope of meeting our 2010 targets, we shall have to burn on an

[Mr. Field]

enormous scale in the short term. Municipal incinerators are the size of power stations, and in addition to their bleak, rather menacing and overpowering presence, the real problem with large-scale incineration is the widely held misconception that if waste is burnt, it simply disappears. We all know that that is not the case, and mass incineration often produces enormous quantities of potentially harmful ash. It is not the kind of ash that comes from burning coal or wood—household waste can seldom be so pure, and burning it often releases toxic chemicals into the air.

In London as a whole, certainly north of the Thames, we rely on a giant incinerator in Edmonton, which handles the waste of no fewer than seven north London authorities. The most recent tests suggest that dioxin-contaminated ash has been used in road building and the manufacture of bricks and breeze blocks. The sheer extent of the problem in Edmonton has yet to be fully determined, but suffice to say that many houses in London—and, indeed, beyond—may already contain highly contaminated material that will not become apparent for some time. At the very worst, we shall run the risk of another asbestos-type scandal every time such houses are demolished or roads are dug up. Although it is argued that the next generation of incinerators will be considerably safer—most of those built in the past were closed following the acceptance of new emission standards in the 1990s—the safe level of dust particles and dioxins remains far from certain.

In many ways, we continue to pursue what is a contamination time bomb. It may be possible to clarify the true extent of the problems only if there are far higher incidence levels of respiratory carcinomas in the decades ahead. I speak on a personal level, as my father passed away some 11 years ago due to a carcinoma of the lung—not that I think it was directly related to such toxins. Medical evidence suggests that such complaints are becoming more widespread. Although that may not be due simply to dioxins in the air, one cannot ignore the fact that it may be a result of what has been happening. As ever, it is notoriously hard to quantify the precise health risks. No serious attempts have been made at clarification—understandably, because many such problems come to light only many decades on.

We cannot allow misinformation and bogus statistics to drive Government policy and there is a risk of nimbyism being involved in the siting of incinerators, but, amid a cloud of ignorance generated by such misinformation, it is unsurprising that many local residents, groups around the country are increasingly becoming alarmed by the prospect of an incinerator being located in their neighbourhood.

Some of the evidence is conflicting. The US Environmental Protection Agency has warned that dioxins may be considerably more toxic than previously thought. The very patchy statistical evidence surrounding incineration is inconclusive, but some preliminary studies on cleaner incinerators suggest that there is little additional health risk. A recent survey in *The Sunday Times* pointed out that incinerators tend to be inflicted on the poorer parts of town, where residents are less able to defend themselves than the better organised middle classes, and we cannot discount the possibility that such people would have poorer health irrespective of an incinerator. I accept that the figures are to some extent muddled, but I hope that the Minister takes on board the concerns that many leading lobbyists in the field will have expressed to him, perhaps rather more forcefully than I have.

Chris Grayling: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that communities in many parts of the country faced with the threat of incinerators tend to fragment and fight each other over their siting instead of fighting a unified battle against the imposition of such facilities by central Government? Does he agree that it would be much more constructive if politicians, residents' groups and local authorities united to try to resist Government pressure instead of taking political advantage locally to fight a NIMBY campaign for electoral purposes?

Mr. Field: I shall have to check the results in Epsom and Ewell, which may not be unconnected with those matters. Perhaps I am being a little unkind to my hon. Friend, who is right that this is a classic community issue that should not be a bandwagon to be jumped on by any political party or residents' group.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I trust that the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell recognises that his remarks and those of his hon. Friend will be widely circulated after the debate and read in *Hansard* with great care by Labour Members.

Mr. Field: One great benefit of representing my seat—not least, among a lot of others, is the high calibre of many local residents—is the fact that I do not have to worry about landfill sites or incinerators, unless the Minister is going to suggest putting one in Hyde park. He will have to speak to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport before doing so. I appreciate that other hon. Members may wish to speak, so I shall canter through my remaining comments.

More than two fifths of homes in England and Wales are served by segregated waste selection schemes, with separate boxes for paper, combustible materials and mixed rubbish. The effort and imagination of individuals is essential if such basic domestic recycling is to work. Interestingly, Friends of the Earth claims that the average net cost of providing a doorstep recycling and composting service is a mere £17 a household per year. That is about £375 million a year for England and Wales as a whole, which is less than one 2,000th of overall Government expenditure. The same environmental pressure group also claims that if the United Kingdom met its recycling target of 30 per cent., that alone could create 40,000 new jobs.

The responsibility for innovative thinking is now in the hands of the waste and resources action programme, which plans to encourage far greater recycling rates and to develop new products from reclaimed paper, glass, plastic and wood. Within a couple of years, it aims to increase the recycling rate for bottles and jars from about 28 per cent. to 35 per cent., and it has great plans for a wide range of new uses to which recycled products can be adapted. In view of the almost universal condemnation that the United States has received from environmental groups across the world, it is interesting that that nation has led the world in terms of much of

the innovative thinking on adapting household waste. Many of the programme's proposals have already proved a great success on the other side of the Atlantic.

It might also come as a surprise to many that two inner-city Conservative local authorities have been among the leaders on recycling. In central London, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, where I was a councillor for eight years until May, and my local authority, City of Westminster, have ambitious plans to beef up their already impressive recycling facilities. I am an inveterate walker in London, and I love walking across all parts of the city, especially areas such as Camden, Haringey and Sutton. It is fair to say that councils of both Labour and Liberal Democrat hue have also had great recycling successes, and I hope that we can build on them together.

I want to talk briefly about my other local authority, which has more profound difficulties. For obvious reasons relating to terrorism, the City of London has been prevented from undertaking large-scale recycling since the mid-1990s, when the IRA threat became stronger, and since 11 September last year. However, a trial of door-to-door recycling has proved so successful that I can announce today that it will be extended to the whole Barbican area in the next year or so. I hope that the City of London, which is right at the heart of the capital, plays its part to ensure that the city has improved recycling.

Some 70 per cent. of my Westminster residents whose front doors open on to the street are already served with door-to-door collection, although the city council's director of environment and leisure laments that only a third use that service. The city council also provides 70 micro-recycling centres, and insists that 47 of its 56 schools have an on-site recycling service. That is not always easy, given the space restrictions in central London. I hope that the other nine follow suit in the next five years.

There is little doubt that Westminster council is happy to put its money where its mouth is. Excluding salaries and overheads, about £1.1 million a year is spent on the recycling programme, and it has three full-time staff on the subject. The additional post of campaigns officer is being advertised.

I make a special plea, not least given the debate on local government finance that will take place later. It is depressing that, as part of the Government's 2002 comprehensive spending review, London local authorities of all political colours stand to suffer the most as a result of recalibration of the annual sum known as the environment, protection and cultural services basket. Although the local authority has complete discretion as to how it spends its money, City of Westminster council directs a significant proportion of its income from that source to waste and recycling services. Another unwarranted and unwanted by-product of central Government's regional gerrymandering may be that local authorities in London are forced as a result to reduce—

Alun Michael: I must be a little hard of hearing. I thought that the hon. Gentleman used the words "gerrymandering" and "Westminster city council" in the same sentence. Was that wise?

Mr. Field: I think that we can safely say that the Minister was somewhat hard of hearing in that instance. The gerrymandering to which I was referring relates to the current spending review.

One great disadvantage of denuding London authorities of money is that they will be forced to reduce—or, at best, to hold stable—funding for recycling. That might mean cutting back grant for EPCS.

In the past financial year, the City of Westminster established five new projects to increase domestic waste recycling rates. Those projects include paper recycling bins at three underground and mainline stations, the first mixed glass recycling vehicle and the further extension of the doorstep recycling scheme.

Uniquely among the main political parties at the last election, the Conservatives made proposals for an active approach to recycling. I hope that the Government will think locally on the issue. They must provide personal and community incentives, and I hope that they use the carrot rather than the stick to encourage people down the recycling route. I hope that they will also encourage people in our cities to take responsibility for changing their lifestyle habits, which are, let us face it, unsustainable in terms of the future of the planet.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Alan Hurst (in the Chair): Order. I remind hon. Members that the convention is that winding-up speeches begin at midday.

11.31 am

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) has changed my understanding of what people mean when they talk about filling the Albert hall with rubbish. Previously, I thought that they were talking about a Barry Manilow concert, but the hon. Gentleman's imagery has caused me to think again.

The waste produced by households accounts for only 7 or perhaps 8 per cent. of all waste, but as the hon. Gentleman said, less household waste than other forms of waste is recycled. Some 40 per cent. of other forms of waste is recycled. The amount of household waste is growing by 3 per cent. a year, and not only is little of it recycled but the vast majority goes into landfill. That option has only a limited life because, as the hon. Gentleman said, the 1999 European Union landfill directive required European states radically to reduce the percentage of waste going into landfill. In any event, we are running out of holes in the ground into which to put rubbish.

The Government's response to the directive was to set local authorities statutory targets for diverting waste from landfill. Ideally, waste is to be moved mainly into compost and recycling, and the target is a 25 per cent. reduction in 1995 landfill levels by 2010. It is not clear what will happen to local authorities that miss the target. There are huge variations among local authorities in the status of recycling. The consortium of local authorities that make up the Hampshire waste project, in my part of the world, recycles 40 per cent. of household waste, but other local authorities recycle as little as 3 per cent. So it is clear that we shall have difficulty reaching the targets set in response to the directive.

So what instruments do we have, other than targets, to ensure that waste is diverted? The hon. Gentleman mentioned the need for individuals substantially to

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

change their practices, and I thoroughly agree. A problem arises, however, as soon as we ask how that change might come about. At present, the main and almost the only clear instrument for diverting municipal waste from landfill is the landfill levy. That is a gate fee of £13 per tonne tipped, which is due to increase by an escalator of £1 per tonne per year. The escalator, which is a key instrument in assisting people to change their management of waste, is a problem because it affects local authorities. There is a substantial difference between the ways in which private companies and local authorities are able to respond to an escalator; perhaps that is why more non-municipal than municipal waste is recycled. Private contractors can change their practices in response to a direct financial instrument, whereas local authorities—because they have an indirect relationship with the people who produce household rubbish but a statutory responsibility to collect and dispose of it—do not have such a direct ability to change. Indeed, the only ability that local authorities have is to influence people to produce less rubbish and recycle more, and to introduce dual bin collections. It is fair to conclude that they do not have the direct ability enjoyed by private sector companies.

However, the landfill levy applies in the same way to local authorities and to the private sector. Therefore, local authorities have to pay the landfill levy as though they were directly able to change the amount of rubbish that they must collect and dispose of. Here is the rub. The local authority has to pay the landfill levy, and the escalator on it, out of the same funds that it uses to promote recycling. Thus, each year that the escalator increases, local authorities have to find the additional money for the landfill levy from their funds for collecting and disposing of rubbish. The more that local authorities pay, the less they are likely to invest in measures to promote recycling. For them, the levy is perverse.

In evidence to the Select Committee in 1999, Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth councils estimated that in 1999-2000 they would pay some £6.6 million in landfill levy—some 20 per cent. of their total waste disposal budget. That has now risen. Twenty per cent. of the funds collected under the landfill levy scheme is repatriated for various schemes including schemes to promote recycling. By definition, local authorities are excluded from that. The money is in the hands of environmental trusts, which are often associated with the landfill companies, and the money goes to non-local authority projects only, although, in some instances, local authorities have partnership arrangements with such projects.

Under those difficult circumstances, how are local authorities trying to meet the targets? As the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster has said, by and large, they seem, increasingly, to be using incineration. I shall not go into whether incineration is safe nor the large quantities of CO_2 that are released into the atmosphere as a result of it. However, I should like to consider the logic of the mechanism so far as incineration is concerned. Given their limited up-front resources—I have already mentioned the problems of local authorities in dealing with their waste disposal funds—many local authorities are signing up to joint arrangements with waste disposal companies which will invest in incinerators. Those companies logically want a return on their investment. The deals that local authorities are signing up to are in the order of 25 years so local authorities are effectively committing themselves to a programme of primacy for incineration over a 25-year period.

To make that investment work, the companies usually require local authority disposal authorities to guarantee a waste stream to the incinerators. Furthermore, to achieve economies of scale, the companies tend to build large incinerators. For example, it is estimated that a plant that incinerates 400,000 tonnes per annum costs only three times as much as one that incinerates 100,000 tonnes per annum. Operating plant now in existence processes on average 240,000 tonnes per annum and, of the 22 incinerators in the planning process, only four are scheduled to process less than 100,000 tonnes.

As a result, local authorities will be locked in a disposal strategy for 25 years—it may not be landfill but it is nevertheless a disposal strategy—and, secondly, the waste stream will have to go to the incinerators because of their size. Therefore, as recycling increases there will come a point at which it must be stopped in order to feed the incinerators, or the local authorities will pay the penalty under the agreements that they have entered into. Logically, it looks as though the United Kingdom may be locking itself into a programme that is the opposite of the waste hierarchy that the Government's waste plan requires: reduction, reuse, recyling and, only finally, disposal.

There is a great deal to commend in the Government's waste strategy. I very much welcome the £140 million that has gone into the waste minimisation fund, and the aim of introducing markets for recycled products, which are absolutely essential. Setting up the WRAP scheme—the waste and resources action programme—is a good example of that strategy.

There is much to commend in the work of local authorities in waste minimisation and waste diversion. I was pleased that putrescibles only were regarded recently as eligible for the renewables levy when considering whether energy from waste should be regarded as a renewable source of energy. That is logical because energy produced from incineration and non-putrescibles is not recycled, but merely a delay of one stage in the burning of fossil fuel. The logic of the instruments now in place and the local authority reaction to those instruments suggest that there is a glass ceiling on the long-term development of waste strategy.

It is a fantasy to suggest that incineration should disappear entirely, or that there never will be problems in respect of the placement of incinerators. Incineration, however, should be at the bottom of the hierarchy and only for material that cannot be recycled or dealt with in other ways. That suggests a need for small incinerators rather than the large incinerators programme upon which several local authorities are embarked at present.

Is there a way forward? I make these modest suggestions. First, if we are to drive towards a hierarchy, which is something we can all sign up to and is central to the Government's waste strategy, it is not logical in the long term simply to drive people from one form of disposal to another. There must be an incineration levy,

which is also subject to an escalator, which progressively weans the UK off incineration, or, which is more likely, places incineration in its proper context—the final resort for material not otherwise capable of disposal. I was pleased that the Government indicated recently that they would keep under review the possibility of introducing an incineration levy to take us on to the next stage in waste management.

Secondly, the landfill tax must distinguish between the functions of the local authority and the private sector. Local authorities must either receive rebates or be substantially exempt from the effect of the tax if they are to make good progress in changing the way in which people dispose of their household waste.

Both taxes must be directed at the aim of the exercise—getting waste reduced, reused and recycled. That means funding the plant and the techniques to make that happen. That will create a virtuous circle rather than a vicious cycle, which I am afraid that we are in at the moment. The time scales have already been set out; we do not have long to do the work. We must do it sooner rather than later.

11.45 am

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I want to speak briefly on one aspect, but I first congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on securing the debate. I represent a very different constituency from his. I have encountered the problems of fly-tipping, and I have had controversial discussions about landfill sites and incinerators.

My background is as a local councillor. I was proud to be involved in Local Agenda 21 and to do my part locally within the bigger global picture of achieving sustainability. However, I encountered great frustration, because as much as one pushes particular initiatives locally, there comes a point at which one cannot achieve any more success without sufficient national support. I want to emphasise that point today.

At one stage, my council was unable to cover the whole borough with kerbside recycling, as the cost of collection became too high compared with what was being saved on landfill tax. The market for paper fell dramatically, and my authority no longer collected cardboard. Such circumstances are tragic. It is hard for a council when a community is willing to recycle and people want kerbside recycling, but it, with its responsibility to the council tax payer, has to make difficult decisions. As such, I was pleased with the Government's initiative to introduce targets for local authorities, because it seemed to be a way for my authority, having been halted in its progress, to move forward again.

However, all the councils in my constituency now have an enormous concern. They have been successful and therefore were given relatively high recycling targets. That is good, but they are in difficulty because there does not seem to be sufficient money to meet the demands. Other authorities that have not recycled at such a great rate have been set lower targets and may be given greater help. In a way, recycling works like the law of diminishing returns: when a council is already recycling at a high level, it costs it more to improve its rates. My plea to the Minister is for some joined-up thinking. We are to have a local government finance debate tonight. The commitment and desire to meet the local recycling rates exists in my local councils, but we need the funds to match.

I have a letter from one of my county councillors, who writes:

> "My local district council has already refused to fully implement its recycling plan unless they receive central funding, despite my pleading that if the government refused to provide the funds they should still proceed with the plan, but over a longer time scale to lessen the impact on the council tax payer."

Such is the talk in my constituency, which greatly concerns me.

All the councils have completed their recycling plans. I went to an exciting presentation by consultants at which members of the public were delighted to see that the targets could be achieved without considering incineration in the short run. The House can imagine that not having that potential conflict on the horizon made me and the members of the public feel very good. However, it was not long before someone put up their hand and said, "That is a wonderful plan, but how will it be paid for?"

Cost is a major issue for authorities such as mine, which appear to have what is described as a high council tax base. All the costs are continually pushed on to council tax payers, but people on fixed incomes will not take kindly to massive council tax increases to promote recycling when they feel that they have made their contribution and that there should be a big difference in their spending power month by month. I therefore urge the Minister to support councils. There is such a willingness out there to tackle this immense problem.

It does not matter how much scientific evidence is produced, people are worried about incineration. However, there is not only bad feeling about that, but huge concern about landfill sites. I recently supported residents who were fighting against one being created. Sadly, we lost that battle, but it must be remembered that locating landfill sites in certain areas has many environmental impacts, apart from the obvious ones.

If permission is granted, as in the case that I have mentioned, a facility will exist for a long time and have a private operator. Even if we are all successful at recycling—this point is similar to that made by the hon. Member for Southampton Test (Dr. Whitehead)—the pit will still have to be filled and lorries will come from even greater distances. That concerns me greatly. The location that I am talking about is in the heart of a tourism area, very near the coast that has just received an award for its outstanding beauty. Therefore, we have huge concerns, but also a willingness to recycle.

I also ask the Minister to consider the position of voluntary groups, which again reflects that willingness. If councils received only a little more money to pump prime, there could be amazing initiatives. A scout group in my ward collected waste paper for 15 years and thereby financed the building of a scout hall. Sadly, however, it abandoned collecting waste paper this year. What a tragedy. Young people and, indeed, the whole community were involved in that activity. Nevertheless, we must remain enthusiastic about recycling.

I shall end by talking about supporting the market for recyclables. I have always felt that we need Government action in that respect—my council could not afford to

[Mrs. Annette L. Brooke]

extend kerbside recycling. It might not cost much for the lorries to travel round, but the cost of disposing of what is collected is a real problem. The sooner there is urgent action to support the market for recyclables, the better.

11.52 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) and the other speakers. I do not have much time but, luckily, they have said most of what needs to be said, so I do not have to repeat it.

As we have heard, most people, individually and at local authority level, have a strong desire to help with recycling. In my local authority, Hillingdon, all parties work hard to try to improve their record, but that is not always easy. As the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) said, people who have made an effort to recycle are sometimes disappointed to find that what they have collected just goes to another landfill site. They wonder what the point of it all is and conclude that the exercise is a bit of a sham. That must be considered.

There are various ways to encourage people to recycle. One method that I heard of recently is reducing the number of collections of non-recyclable household rubbish, but I have doubts about that. If we imagine the food waste that might accumulate over, say, two weeks in the summer, we can see that that method has inherent problems. It is also fair to say that there would be fly-tipping of household rubbish, so we must consider such methods carefully.

Having been in retailing for many years, I have noticed how much the use of wrapping and packaging has increased. Economic reasons are sometimes given for that, because it is easier to hang products on hooks and because consumers demand that goods arrive fully packaged, as they think that that protects them. My particular area was furniture. When I started, furniture would be delivered covered in a travelling rug. We would remove it before we went into the house, but increasingly people said that they wanted the furniture to be wrapped by the manufacturers. More shrink wrapping and cardboard is now used. There is a cultural problem with wrapping that we must consider. Of course, there are hygiene reasons for covering food, but as a part-time shopper in supermarkets, I have noticed that there is a tremendous amount of wrapping to get through before one gets to the food.

Alun Michael: I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's references to furniture, as my father was in that trade too. How often did people demand of the hon. Gentleman that items should have greater packaging? To what extent does consumer demand, as distinct from the retail trade's beliefs about it, provide the pressure?

Mr. Randall: Quite often, the consumer feels that if a product does not come packaged from the retailer it is shop soiled or has not been looked after properly. Sometimes they also want it to be checked beforehand. For example, consumers who buy a bed want the mattress to be inspected, but they also want it to be wrapped up again. I can understand that, but there is a consumer problem. There is also the problem of plastic bags. I know that my party is not in favour of levying taxes, but according to the anecdotal evidence the system in Ireland is working. Some of my colleagues in retail would probably not be too happy about such a scheme, but we must consider the problem.

Finally, the recycling collection points in our constituencies often become eyesores, so people do not want them outside their house or along their shopping parade. Perhaps we should study new designs and see how collection points may be made more attractive so that people would be happier to have them built nearby. The point has been made that that must become part of our culture—we must educate people more. Other hon. Members may have had similar experiences when visiting schools: the children are all very worried about the environment and recycling, yet one sees most litter outside schools.

Returning to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster made about deposits on lemonade and beer bottles, perhaps we should use a "carrot" approach. He mentioned the credit system in Denmark. The matter may not be as simple as handing over 10p or 3p for a plastic or glass bottle, but a small financial incentive, as well as the knowledge that they are helping the environment, might encourage children and young people to collect a lot of such litter. They must feel that the material will be recycled. As others have said, we must improve. This is a non-partisan subject that we must tackle quickly.

11.59 am

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I thank the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) for calling the debate. We debate rubbish quite often, but do not make much progress. I hope that we will make more progress today.

Several statistics show that in general we are missing our recycling targets and materials recovery targets. Rather than fill up all the time that we have available, I will simply quote a useful statistic from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs digest of environmental statistics. The proportion of municipal waste disposed of to landfill has been reduced from 84 per cent. in 1996 to 78 per cent. now—but municipal waste has grown by 14.6 per cent. from 24.6 million tonnes to 28.2 million tonnes.

We are going backwards, and our approach to recycling and household waste is pathetic and sad, especially when we consider what our colleagues in Europe do. We have modest targets, but we are about to fail in relation to several of them. We missed one target by 10 years, and reached only 40 per cent. recycling against current projections, according to a study by the Environmental Services Association.

We need to support local authorities. Hon. Members have mentioned how much support local authorities need. They are doing their best, but are struggling. Guildford, one of my local authorities, sends plastic bottles all the way to Stratford for recycling into underground pipes. That is good, but it costs the authority money. There is nothing to encourage householders to minimise waste, and we could do so much more with Government help and support. There are no tools. We are procrastinating while the waste

increases. We want to reduce packaging, and the packaging waste directives are a useful tool for doing that, but we must also consider the waste that we generate. We must do much more. Councils need the tools to encourage people to sort waste at the kerbside. My council is issuing green cones to deal with food waste, and I hope that councils doing this pilot work will start to receive answers to their questions about how they can reduce collection but increase recycling.

Much more needs to be done to enable local councils to develop markets for recycling and waste products. I am talking about recycling, but the country's mindset still seems to be "burn and bury". What are we doing to stop the blight of landfill, which means living with smells, flies and vermin? The UK has one of the worst records of recycling in the western world. There is much that we can do. We need to encourage a reduction in waste.

The landfill tax, which has been mentioned several times, is a pathetically weak instrument. I am very much in favour of it, but it does little to reduce landfill. So much more could be done. The tax does not hurt the end user, and consumers do not feel much effect on their pockets. We must weigh up whether it might be better if they did. The tax could be increased substantially. Without an increase, little help will be given to local government to fund a sustainable waste strategy.

The pre-Budget report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee recommended that landfill tax should be increased considerably, and that the Government should not wait until 2004 to increase it. However, the Government knew better; they continued to ignore what was happening and stuck to their very modest plans. We could do more to incentivise the recovery of waste. We could tax incineration by having a universal waste tax. We need to take modest steps even to meet the Government's very modest targets.

Understandably, every plan for incineration is met with protest. I was disappointed by the intervention by the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). As a Surrey MP, he will know that before the last election the only approach to incineration among Members from his party who represent Surrey was to say, "We don't want incineration ourselves, but we agree with incineration in someone else's constituency." There was an unholy cycle of moving waste around but not working against incineration. I differed with my colleagues in that I refused to support incineration. We need a moratorium on all new incineration proposals.

The Government face a difficult problem. For all the reasons already outlined, people will not tolerate new incinerators. They have had enough, they are worried, and the Government should go in another direction.

We need a sustained national recycling programme. We have already talked about the problems with neighbouring authorities. If one authority gets tough, there will be fly-tipping in another authority. Such matters must be considered, not to detract from what local authorities do, but so that the Government can support them. We need a waste and recycling action programme, and perhaps some other ideas, such as zero waste. Two councils recently turned down proposals for zero waste because they wanted to know what it meant, and whether they could achieve it.

Zero waste is a mindset. It is about using resources that we would otherwise throw away as often as we can until they are rendered inert. We can then dispose of them, possibly through landfill, but in a way that would not generate all the problems we associate with landfill, such as flies, smell and leaching. Zero waste methods are growing across the world. New Zealand is a zero waste country. Nova Scotia is a zero waste province. Canberra in Australia and Toronto in Canada are zero waste cities. Bath and North East Somerset is a zero waste council. I would like to congratulate Milton Keynes, which has become a zero waste city since the change in the council, and has turned down the existing plans for an incinerator. Those ideas are taking hold in this country.

One can do an awful lot through the logic of zero waste. The idea is not so outlandish. If one keeps on recycling paper, one can reuse wood fibre six times over—but I agree with the concerns about the market for that. We need better product design, some of which will come through Europe, with the end of life vehicles directive and the electronics waste directive. The Government have not yet got to grips with simple things like sorting waste at the doorstep through kerbside collection.

Supporters of zero waste would say that the doorstep collection of dry recyclables should be extended to every home without delay. Home composting should be supported through the doorstep collection of organic waste. A network of local closed vessel compost plants should be established; there is no need to drive stuff all over the country. From 2006, landfilling with biological waste that has not been treated and neutralised should be banned. The thermal treatment—incineration—of mixed waste should also be ended, and disposal contracts should be limited to a maximum of 10 years. I agree with the concerns about what will feed incinerators over the years, because the contracts are so long. Landfill tax should be extended and become a disposal tax. It should be increased and used to fund zero waste programmes. Producer responsibility should be extended and waste planning opened up to greater public participation. A zero waste agency should be established. Those approaches are not very hard to achieve, and the Government should support them.

I heard with interest what was said about schools, tuck shops and rubbish. I had a lovely meeting at a local school, Boxgrove primary school, which has a school council. The children have representatives on it, from the reception class up, and they are asking what the school was doing about rubbish. They suggested that their tuck shop should sell fruit, and the orange peel could be recycled. They are not asking for crisps because they know that would cause a local problem—and they might actually eat their school lunch, which will delight parents. Those kids are saying many sensible things.

The idea of a tax on plastic bags is not rocket science; it is an excellent idea and we could use it. Many people worry about fly-tipping, but an Ernst and Young study of other countries found that although the figures initially go up when more taxes on waste are introduced, they then fall back. The income on plastic bags will go up, which will fund recycling initiatives. That will fall off later, but we may be recycling by then. I urge the Minister to consider some radical approaches to waste, because the way we are going is taking us backwards.

12.8 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): This has been a valuable, thoughtful and constructive debate, but it has also been a disturbing one. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on bringing it to the attention of the House. He has confirmed his reputation for having an interest in garbage, which was previously pure speculation. Rightly and seriously, he has highlighted important issues that cross party divides and are important both to his constituents and to everyone else in the country. A debate on such important matters is valuable, not least because, as several hon. Members have said, the European landfill directive adopted by the EC in 1999 has now been incorporated into national law. The UK will have to make enormous changes to the way in which it deals with waste if it is to comply with that directive.

When I was doing my research for the debate, I discovered that we create enough rubbish in a day to fill Trafalgar square to the height of Nelson's column. In simple-to-grasp terms, that gives us some feel for the volume of the problem confronting us.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): Here is another interesting statistic: every hour, we fill the equivalent of the Albert hall with rubbish. I thought that that might add to my hon. Friend's rather recondite statistics.

Mr. Hayes: I am reluctant to give any more examples, or the metaphor will become rather elaborate. I am sure that we could think of many landmarks around Britain, and in London in particular, that could be filled with waste—but perhaps I am inviting comments about filling the House of Commons with garbage, which might be unwise, and against both my interests and my aim of engaging the support of my colleagues in summarising the debate.

Clearly, the UK faces enormous challenges in meeting the directive. To put some flesh on the bones, I shall remind the House of some of its specifics. In 2002—this year—we face the prohibition of the use of landfill for specified waste, including liquid hazardous waste and clinical infectious waste. By 2004 landfill will be prohibited for hazardous and non-hazardous wastes, and by 2010 we shall need to reduce biodegradable household waste, first to 75 per cent. of the 1995 level, then to 50 per cent. and ultimately, in 2020, to 35 per cent. of that level. Those seem like ambitious targets when we examine Britain's performance thus far, but not when we consider the European experience. Measured by European standards, those targets look attainable and even, when we think about some countries—or colleagues, as they were described earlier—relatively modest. As Members throughout the Chamber have said, we have a lot of catching up to do.

The debate has been thoughtful as well as valuable. I was interested when my hon. Friend who introduced the debate said that the whole business of recycling had a key role in building community, reminding people of their responsibilities and encouraging them to collaborate for the common good. I do not want to become too philosophical in the short time available, but as a Conservative I believe that we inherit the environment and landscape features and have a responsibility to leave those as a legacy to future generations. In a sense, my hon. Friend referred to that when he talked about the feeling that this subject can generate within a community.

My hon. Friend also said that the issue was long-term and must be faced strategically, and that we could not go for quick-fix solutions. We need to build in a range of strategic measures to change attitudes, and my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) talked about changing the culture. Such cultural change will require real commitment from a variety of agencies—a point to which I shall return in a moment.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) made a thoughtful and well informed contribution, as always. I was particularly interested in his point about the patchy performance of local authorities on this issue. That is a matter of fact, and crosses the party divide. We have also heard something about Westminster and kerbside collection in that borough, but he will acknowledge—as, I am sure, will other hon. Members and the Minister—that Labour authorities are among the worst culprits. I do not think that this is a party political issue.

However, if we are to expect more of local authorities, which we must, it is important to resource and support them. That means not only money, but encouraging strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, to allow the private sector to do what it does best, but in co-operation with, rather than in contradiction of, what local authorities are expected and obliged to do to meet the directive. The issue is interesting, because a public-private partnership is a matter of necessity rather than choice.

The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) talked about the importance of getting young people to think about the issue. When she discussed recycling waste paper I could not help thinking about *Focus* leaflets, which was cruel.

Alun Michael: Cruel but fair.

Mr. Hayes: That comment was beneath me, and I should not have made it. The hon. Lady was as earnest as ever, and she made a helpful contribution about the importance of involving communities and including children. If we are to change our culture we have to start by getting children to think about waste, rubbish, litter and recycling, which must be done at community level.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge talked about producer responsibility, with which I shall deal in a moment, but first I shall consider what my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster described as our "risible" performance. All hon. Members will be aware of the 2001 report by the Select Committee on Er .ronment, Transport and Regional Affairs, which attacked the

"continuing inertia and low level of expectation which characterise waste management in this country."

The Committee also attacked the Government's much vaunted waste strategy 2000, which is depressingly limited in its ambition and

"lets down those in the industry, and large numbers of citizens who are looking to offer something dramatically better than the status quo."

That is not a happy analysis by that robust and intelligent group of people, who were commissioned to examine those matters in detail.

The environmental sustainability index ranks the UK as just about the worst performer in the world in recycling waste. It has already been mentioned that the amount of municipal waste generated by households and businesses has been increasing by 3 to 5 per cent. each year, and about 80 per cent. of such waste is disposed of in landfill sites. The 11 per cent. UK household recycling rate is one of the lowest in Europe. Germany, Austria and Switzerland have recycling rates of about 50 per cent., and the targets are not ambitious when considered in that context. The targets are ambitious for us, but would not be particularly so for other countries further down the road.

I hope that the Minister will have time to address the particular problem of tyres. He will know that the landfill directive stipulates that by 2003 whole tyres must not be disposed of through landfill, and by 2006 there will be a ban on disposing of shredded tyres through landfill. The problem is massive, given the number of waste tyres generated by towns and cities in Britain, and not being able to dispose of them easily and conveniently will lead to a significant problem. Will the Minister address that issue when he sums up?

Every other country deals with waste disposal through local authorities, but when local authorities are asked to do the work they must be properly equipped and resourced. The Minister will say that extra money is available and that consultation has occurred, but some smaller local authorities will find it difficult to use the money in a planned way in order to target their spending effectively. One obvious solution involves encouraging businesses to invest in the necessary equipment through council tax incentives and tax breaks. As the hon. Member for Southampton, Test said, the commercial sector is a big generator of waste, but we have not got to grips with incentivising it to invest in the necessary equipment to dispose of waste as we all feel it should. The targets should not be contradictory and should encourage outcomes that are based on real capacity. Landfill tax revenues must be brought back into recycling. The Government have estimated that a third of them will be, but we need an indicative number and firm commitments.

More inter-agency work is required. The public sector is a massive generator of waste, and agencies must work together to ensure that their waste is dealt with properly. What incentives exist for commercial organisations to put in the necessary work with local authorities, as the hon. Member for Southampton, Test said? Why is there no tyre recycler on the used tyre taskforce, which produced its sixth report earlier in the year?

The key to the problem is establishing a hierarchy for the disposal and recycling of waste. The national waste policy should place a burden of proof on producers and manufacturers, so that we can achieve the targets that we all believe to be essential for our national well-being.

12.20 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): As parliamentarians, we hear rubbish talked about a wide variety of subjects, so it is good to hear a lot of sense uttered by Members on both sides of the Chamber in a debate about rubbish. I particularly welcome the recognition by the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) that things need to change and that we have a long way to go. It is wonderful how a spell in opposition can change attitudes. I am glad that he provided a reminder of the constraints that will be placed on the disposal of tyres, because people will have to plan ahead. Implementation of the European legislation on fly-tipping presents a problem that has already arisen in many parts of the country. Obviously, we want to maximise reuse. That is why the schemes that I shall discuss involve a great deal of activity concerning the potential uses of recycled tyres.

I congratulate the hon. Member for the quaintly named constituency of Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) on securing the debate and on the manner in which he introduced it. I agreed with a great deal of his constructive speech, but I must take issue with one or two points. He suggested that London is central, whereas Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield might have better claims. He claimed that he did not want to make party political points, but went on to say that not enough catching up has been done in the past seven years. It is curious that he should select that specific period, and fail to refer to the conspicuous failure of Conservative Governments to deal with the issue during the previous 18 years.

I experienced the frustration mentioned by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) when I chaired the finance committee of Cardiff city council in the 1980s. We were ambitious about improving waste disposal and recycling, but at that time much of the capacity of local government to take initiatives was being destroyed by the Thatcherite attack on local government. We should not forget the history of that period, because we need to learn from damage that it did. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley), who is condemned to silence in debates because of his role as my Parliamentary Private Secretary, reminded me that as a member of Westminster city council in the mid-1990s he proposed door-to-door categorised recycling collections, but the idea was rejected by the majority Conservative group. He also pointed out that some £32 million in profits from parking and fines meant that the council could have afforded to do a lot more—an opportunity that is not available to many local authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) welcomed several aspects of the Government's approach and of the work of local authorities, as well as describing some of the challenges that we face. Nimbyism is often a problem. As several hon. Members said, it is difficult to debate objectively on the basis of facts when dealing with local issues. However, it can be done, and I was pleased to hear the hon. Members for Cities of London and Westminster and for Mid-Dorset and North Poole say that all hon. Members have a responsibility to promote a sensible debate based on facts and on the challenges faced in a particular area.

The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole said that local authorities had been given high targets. However, they have also been given significant help. She suggested that there was a danger of the law of diminishing returns applying in relation to improving recycling levels. That is true, but it can also be difficult to

[Alun Michael]

make a start. Once the population understand that their recycling efforts are being taken seriously, it is possible to get on to an escalator.

A topic dealt with in several contributions was the extent to which local authorities want central funding but also a reduction in ring fencing. They want to be able to use the resources available to them in a way appropriate to their area. There is always a tension between the wish for finances for this and other activities to be provided so as to give the maximum freedom to use them in a way that suits the local area, and the need to meet overall objectives.

The Government's waste strategy was published in May 2000. The vision is to change the way in which we manage waste and resources to improve our quality of life. To do that, we must tackle the amount of waste produced and break the link between economic growth and increased waste. When waste is produced, we must put it to good use through recycling, reuse and recovery. In short, we need to improve greatly the very low levels of recycling that have traditionally been achieved in England.

To ensure that we can achieve such aims, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs called together the key stakeholders for a waste summit last November. Since then, the Prime Minister's strategy unit has been considering what further steps, in addition to those already taken, must be taken to achieve the waste strategy 2000 objectives. The unit is assessing what extra instruments, changes to targets or regulations and/or additional funding may be required to ensure that the strategy is effectively delivered and that we can develop more sustainable waste management. The unit's report should be published shortly.

I referred to challenges. It is clear that the key issue for the review will be the need to make major strides on recycling. In 2000-01, we recycled or composted only 11 per cent. of our household waste in England. That was a small increase on previous years and progress looks slow, but this is in the period before statutory targets and extra Government funding have been put in place. I have been told that local authorities in England are roughly on track to meet the first target for 17 per cent. of household waste to be recycled or composted by 2003-04. However, as the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) pointed out, the growth in the amount of waste produced has continued to outstrip the increase in recycling, so the amount sent to landfill is still increasing. That cannot continue.

I particularly welcome the comments made in opening the debate by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster that recycling is a responsibility not just of Government and local government but of individuals, families and communities. If we approach the matter in that way, we have a chance to make the sort of improvements that we want.

The EU landfill directive has set tough and binding targets to reduce and control the landfill of biodegradable municipal waste. To help achieve those obligations, we have set ourselves challenging national targets for recycling and composting household waste. Local government must double the amount of recycling over three years and triple it in the five years to 2005-06. We intend to see those targets delivered and have set every local authority individual statutory targets. If necessary, we will use the powers under the best value regime to intervene to support their delivery.

As for the comments of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster, progress has been slow in Westminster, and we require every local authority to meet its targets. So far there has been a 1 per cent. increase in the rate of recycling to 7 per cent. over the 1998-1999 rate. However, I hope that the range of initiatives that Westminster currently has in place will improve its recycling performance and that the hon. Gentleman will encourage it in that direction. The recycling team offers many micro recycling centres as well as a door-to-door recycling collection service. I sincerely hope that it is now moving in the right direction and will meet its statutory targets of 12 per cent. for 2003-04 and 18 per cent. for 2005-06.

The City of London corporation must also take significant action to address its low household recycling rate. A recent estimate for 2001-02 placed the rate of recycling at 11 per cent., which is a marked improvement on the 1998-99 figure of less than 1 per cent., and I understand that the Barbican is currently achieving 25 per cent. The corporation has taken action to deliver its first statutory targets but it has probably done the easy bit. The challenge of reaching 18 per cent. for 2005-06 remains, and it will have to consider what further steps it needs to take to deliver on that target.

I am aware of the challenges to household recycling in that largely commercial area and there are security considerations, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but we need to make progress. We do not tell local authorities how to deliver their recycling because they are best placed to do that, taking account of local issues such as type of housing. I am interested to see some conversion to local government on the Opposition Benches. However, we recognise that local authorities cannot meet the statutory performance—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr Edward O'Hara): Order. We now come to the debate on child care workers.

Child Care Workers

12.30 pm

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Within an hour of Mr. Speaker granting me the opportunity to highlight concerns relating to vetting of child care workers, the Department of Health rang my office to ask what I would be saying and to find out whether the Department of Health or the Home Office would respond. In doing so, it unwittingly demonstrated the first major problem: who takes responsibility for vetting? If the Departments do not know, what hope is there further down the line of accountability?

Vetting should be multi-agency, of course, but there should be clear lines of accountability leading via Ministers to one Secretary of State. At present, there are at least three Secretaries of State involved—four including the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I shall say more about that later.

I confirm that I told the Minister in writing prior to this debate the areas that I would be covering. I told him that the debate would cover the work of three Departments based on my tabled questions and ministerial answers over a three-year period, and would draw on written ministerial replies to me about vetting concerns from three Departments. Aided with that information, I trust that the Minister will be able to respond to my concerns about health, education and Home Office matters and the implications for Northern Ireland. Failure to do so would further indicate the limitations of the existing structure of accountability.

What is wrong with the vetting of child care workers? Gaps, a limited definition of child care workers—I know that because I was responsible for the definition—poor lines of accountability, a lot of buck-passing at local level and fudging at ministerial level. No one person ultimately takes responsibility at local level or Government level.

The report, "Safeguarding Children", which was published on Monday, contains a clear insight into the problems of child protection as it currently operates. Many of its observations about the

"ability of agencies and professionals to safeguard children"

being compromised could be applied to the various vetting processes. The report states that, first,

"The priority given to safeguarding had not been reflected firmly, coherently or consistently enough in service planning, resource allocation nationally or locally across all agencies".

That includes vetting.

Secondly, the report says:

"Local agencies interpreted their safeguarding responsibilities in different ways or with a different emphasis. Other priorities competing for attention had sometimes resulted in resources being diverted away from key safeguarding activity".

Thirdly, it says:

"The priority that senior staff said was given to safeguarding children was not reflected in many agencies' business plans".

The report continued:

"Many staff . . . were confused about their responsibilities and duties to share information about child care and welfare concerns with other agencies and were not confident about whether other agencies shared information with them".

Damningly, it also stated:

"Despite consistency in the findings of enquiries over past years about weaknesses and failings in information sharing, there were few formal"—

I emphasise the word "formal"—

"agreements between agencies about how"—

I also emphasise the word "how"—

"and when information should be shared".

This is certainly true with a view to vetting with organisations not covered by the Protection of Children Act 1999.

I would like the Minister to put on the record today his response to that specific point. He need not take up limited time by telling me what the working groups are doing or about interdepartmental ministerial meetings. I am well aware of that. I would like to know the outcome and what exactly is being done to ensure that the inspectors' criticism is being dealt with with a view to vetting—or does the Minister believe that the inspectors are wrong? I, for one, believe that they have been very moderate in their report.

For example, it has been brought to my attention that in the London borough of Southwark children are collected from school by drivers and escorts who are not known to the school. When challenged, they failed to produce photo identity as to who they are. Have those people, who have apparently been provided by various agencies, including International Aunties, been vetted? Who knows? Certainly not Southwark council.

I have been assured in writing by Southwark council that all the necessary procedures are in place, but those are empty words, because no recording system exists in the schools. If a driver or escort arrives to collect a child and says that he has forgotten his identification pass, the child is nevertheless sent off with him; the school does not take responsibility. If the case is brought to the attention of social services, they simply pass the buck by saying that procedures are in place; they will not take responsibility either.

Last week, I personally asked the chief executive of Southwark council to ensure that, at the very least, any driver or escort who is collecting a child, and who is unknown to the school, has his or her details, such as a driving licence, noted. I was flatly told by the chief executive that in boroughs such as Southwark, which has so many children in this position, operating such a system would be impossible. Clearly, he will not take responsibility for those children.

I also gave the chief executive the name of a girl about whom I had worries. I carefully spelled out her name, but his secretary had to ring me the next day because the chief executive had managed to take it down wrongly. A week later, having had no response, my office rang the chief executive's office to discover that the name had been passed on to social services—the very people who I had said were not on top of the case. The chief executive did not contact me at all.

I asked Romi Burns, the deputy director of social services for Southwark, for an update. She said that she had been asked to ring me but did not have my number. So, we are dealing with a social services deputy director who does not know how to ring the House of Commons. When questioned, she simply reiterated that drivers are properly checked and procedures adhered to. How did she know? Schools do not have to maintain records

[Ms Debra Shipley]

because, as the chief executive had explicitly stated, it would be impossible for them do so. The answer must be that she did not know. Advice being issued was good enough for her, but it is far from good enough for someone in so senior a position to be so complacent.

When I asked about the little girl who I had named to the chief executive, she said that she knew the name but had no information because the case was being dealt with by the education department. When we rang the head of education, we were told that they were "interrogating information". If that is an example of Southwark council dealing with an MP, what hope is there for concerned members of the public who attempt to blow the whistle to help safeguard children? What will the Minister do to ensure that such complacency and buck-passing is quickly brought to an end?

I now turn to the work of the Criminal Records Bureau. My Bill, which became the Protection of Children Act 1999, changed part 5 of the Police Act 1997 to facilitate the establishment of the Criminal Records Bureau. I therefore followed with interest last week's exchange in the other place. When the Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform—a Minister of State at the Home Office—was questioned about the CRB's poor performance he had no reply other than to reiterate what had happened. Perhaps the Minister in the Chamber today will be able to improve on that. To help him, I shall be specific.

My first point is that last February, I asked the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety—another Home Office Minister of State—in a written question, to list bodies registered with the CRB, and he refused. He stated:

"Since most had not given their specific consent, it would not be appropriate".

I must ask: why? What do they have to hide? He went on to say that the details of those who have given consent were available on the website www.disclosure.gov.uk. It had not occurred to that Home Office Minister in February that the fact that most organisations were not giving consent was a problem. What is the view of the Health Minister who is to answer the debate today?

Secondly, I was seriously shocked, when I questioned the CRB's chief executive, to discover that compliance checks do not mean, as I had hoped, that random checks are undertaken to ensure that an employer who has been informed that certain individuals are unsuitable for, or banned from, working with children is not employing such individuals. It seems that "compliance checks" mean that the CRB will check that the forms have been correctly filled in and that the prospective employee has given his or her permission for the check. That is a major loophole in the CRB system because paedophiles will knowingly employ other paedophiles, and the public rely on the fact that an individual has been checked if the organisation has the kudos of being registered with the CRB. How are the public to know whether the employee is suitable? We do not know, because the Minister of State says that we do not have to be told.

I raised those matters in writing last April with the same Minister. I can only say that he fudged the answers by explaining what had happened and finally stating that I was correct in my assessment. I do not want to be correct; I want Ministers to ensure that what the CRB has revealed is acted upon correctly. Does the Minister who is here today agree with me, and what will he do to facilitate that?

I also raised the problem of court records in relation to the CRB vetting process with the Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform in April. In order for a vetting process to be up to date, court records need to be electronically communicated to the CRB immediately after sentencing. That administrative measure will be greatly welcomed by the CRB and the police. The Minister wrote to tell me that

"the principal database from which the CRB will draw its information is the Police National Computer".

Will the Minister who is to answer the debate please clarify today whether the PNC receives electronic information directly from the courts immediately after sentencing? Will he also update me on whether that information is now available to the CRB? On a wider point, will he address the issue of referrals of abusers?

In a letter that I received on 23 September from the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), I was told:

"As you know, all non-regulated child care organisations are encouraged to refer names to the Secretary of State for possible inclusion on the Protection of Children Act list and to check against the list when proposing to appoint people to any childcare position".

That sounds okay; most parents, on receiving a letter like that, would assume that child care workers employed by agencies and organisations would have been vetted. They would be entirely wrong in that assumption. As the Back-Bench MP responsible for the Protection of Children Act 1999, I know that my definition of a child care worker is precise and very limited, and so, too, is the list of statutory bodies that are required to vet their workers. I also know that there is a massive difference between saying that an agency "must" vet a worker, and saying that it "may".

The same applies to the suspicion of abuse. Under my Act, statutory bodies are required to instigate investigation procedures and refer known abusers for listings. Other agencies and organisations are only encouraged to do so. For example, private tutors need not be vetted. What is more, prior to my Protection of Children Act, vetting procedures—apart from those relating to education List 99 for teachers—were almost impossible to carry out. They were at best piecemeal and at worst non-existent. That means that before my Act was passed, many people employed as child care workers were not vetted to discover whether they had ever physically or sexually harmed a child.

I took that matter up with the Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform , and was appalled at his reply, which I received on 13 September. The Secretary of State, in effect, washed his hands of the whole business. The Minister wrote:

"As to existing employees...In general, it is a matter for employers to decide whether or not they wish to carry out checks on existing staff and whether they wish periodically to re-check their staff."

That reply is simply not good enough. A responsible employer might seek to carry out retrospective vetting now that the possibility exists, but it is the sloppy, the

second-rate and the plain bad employers that should be required to vet. It is not good enough for that Minister to pass responsibility to the employer; he should be taking the lead himself. His failure to do so may have something to do with employment legislation, as in his letter he went on to say:

"Where employers wish to ask existing staff to undergo checks they need to pay due regard to the terms of the relevant contracts or conditions of employment. They may wish to seek professional advice".

That is a clear hint that retrospective vetting may be hampered by employment legislation. Unfortunately, the Minister concerned did not offer to look into the issue; he did not liaise with his ministerial colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry. As far as I am aware, he just let the matter drop.

A decent employer seeking to do the right thing and vet existing employees is on his or her own. That is not good enough, and I look to the Minister who will respond today to undertake to make good this serious legislative hurdle in the vetting process.

My Protection of Children Act 1999 does not cover Northern Ireland, but the Assembly was seeking to put its own expanded version of it on to the statute books. The Northern Ireland version would introduce a welcome extra dimension, that of accreditation, in clause 16. However, I wish the Minister to tell us today how the accreditation of voluntary organisations will be supported and promoted by all Government Departments. I also want him to comment on the vetting of those who cross the border from the south to work with children in the north. At present, there is no equivalent vetting process in the Republic of Ireland, which effectively creates a major loophole in our system when child care workers come over here from the island of Ireland. The Minister will undoubtedly have been made aware of my concerns, so what I am looking for today is a progress report.

Finally, I almost feel sorry for the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy), who has the task of replying today. I want to put on the record the fact that he did not make any of the ministerial replies that I have quoted; in every case, and with regard to every Department, the replies were made by Ministers of State. That raises the question of why my hon. Friend was considered to be the most appropriate Minister to respond today.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) for giving us this opportunity to debate these important matters. I know that she takes a passionate interest in helping to ensure that our children, who are the most vulnerable members of our society, are offered the best possible level of protection. That is very evident from what she has said today.

I should begin by saying that the Home Office is the Department that takes the lead on such issues, but it is clear that other Departments also have their respective responsibilities, and the Government think carefully about which of them should respond to specific Adjournment debates. I am pleased to respond to the debate today. I also refer my hon. Friend to the way in which she framed her debate; it is about social care workers. Therefore, as I am part of the Health team, it is appropriate for me to respond today.

We remain grateful to my hon. Friend for guiding her private Member's Bill through Parliament. That resulted in the Protection of Children Act 1999, which the Government implemented in October 2000, and it was that legislation which, for the first time, required Government to maintain a list of persons considered to be suitable to work with children, and to place specific requirements on child care organisations to carry out comprehensive vetting of the staff whom they intend to appoint to work with children. The legislation that was proposed by my hon. Friend was a vital first step towards achieving the Government's aim of establishing a framework of coherent cross-sector schemes for identifying people considered to be unsuitable to work with children, and to prevent such people from gaining access to children through their work.

Ms Shipley: I know what my Act did. It is not cohesive, extensive or anything else; it is very precise and limited. It also has lots of holes, which I regret, but I could not get the necessary changes through at the time. I do not want to sit here and listen to a description of what already exists—and, in particular, of what I have done. I want the Minister to address the questions that I have raised today.

Mr. Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments, but it is important that I put the history of the matter on the record, because it pertains to many of the points that she raised both today and when the Act was passing through Parliament.

I wish to make some progress now, so that I can get around to addressing my hon. Friend's points. As she has said, many of them have been addressed in correspondence with various Departments, but I will seek to write to her if I am unable to get around to dealing with all of them in this debate.

I know from what my hon. Friend has said today that she would like the elements in her legislation that require organisations to seek checks on their staff to be applied to all organisations that work with children, rather than only to the statutory sector. However, that would involve some intractable problems. It was recognised very early on in the life of the Protection of Children Act that a scheme that required all employers to check that Act's list would be impossible to monitor and enforce.

That issue goes to the heart of much of what has preoccupied my hon. Friend over the past two years—and, indeed, of what has been said today. For that reason, a requirement to undertake relevant checks was made for organisations that are regulated by statute—those who employ social workers, nursery staff and everyone who works in children's homes—while other organisations are encouraged to undertake such checks.

Indeed, the net is widely cast in relation to the type of person on whom a check might be sought. In past correspondence my hon. Friend asked about minicab

[Mr. Lammy]

drivers who drive children; for example, a minicab driver may offer to parents the service of driving unaccompanied children—

Ms Shipley: No, I did not. Will the Minister confirm that I did not raise that issue?

Mr. Lammy: The issue raised related to taxis to school. My hon. Friend will know that, in London, as in other cities, a service is provided by taxis, minicabs and various other companies that transport children to school. Service providers are encouraged to vet their drivers, and it is right for the Government to encourage that. As important as the various checks are, however, it must remain paramount for all organisations entrusted with the care of children and other vulnerable people to carry out the full range of pre-employment checks to search for criminal backgrounds. That is only one part of a process that should include face-to-face interviews. Checking the referees and references of the various people is equally important. An applicant's employment history must be considered and employers must be satisfied that any gaps in details are adequately explained.

The Government quickly built on the foundations laid by my hon. Friend, and in January 2000 we implemented part 2 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 which, taken with the building blocks contained within the Protection of Children Act and the Education Acts of 1988 and 1996, complemented the integrated scheme to prevent unsuitable people working with children. The child protection measures in part 2 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 created a new way for the courts to disqualify unsuitable people from working with children, in addition to the existing schemes for education and child care. Those who commit a serious offence against children can therefore be prevented from all such work by means of disqualification by a judge, as part of their sentence or the disposal of their case.

We also ensured that the Act provided for the disqualification to apply to persons included on the Protection of Children Act List and to those included on the list maintained by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills—List 99—which, as my hon. Friend knows, contains the names of persons barred by the Secretary of State from working in educational establishments. The Act also provided strong criminal sanctions against those who breached the disqualification order, whether the new order was imposed by the courts or the person had been included on the Protection of Children Act list.

Ms Shipley: The Minister is treating me to a history lesson, using information of which I am extremely well aware—as I hoped I demonstrated when I was speaking earlier. He has seven minutes left, in which he should attempt to answer at least one of my questions. I would like him to answer some of the questions that I raised.

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend raised several issues, including the taxiing of children, which I believe I have dealt with. She also raised the issue of the requirement of all organisations—

Ms Shipley: I did not mention the words, "taxiing of children". I never said "taxiing". I said that in some Southwark schools children are collected by drivers and escorts who are unknown to the schools, and that those people often fail to provide evidence of identity. The chief executive told me that the schools would find it an overwhelming task to record all the information. The question that I want answering has nothing to do with taxiing.

Mr. Lammy: As my hon. Friend will have heard, I am setting out the obligations that rest on the relevant bodies, and those relate to the illustration that she provided. I am seeking to deal with it and I want to make progress. We can exchange views, but I cannot make progress unless my hon. Friend allows me to continue. I shall certainly write to her if I cannot reach a conclusion on the issues that she raised.

The complete framework of protection provided by the 2000 Act introduced a new definition of working with children, which formed the area to be covered by disqualification. Working with children in all sectors—including voluntary work and irrespective of whether that work is paid or unpaid—thus fell within the remit of the scheme. My hon. Friend posed questions about the definition of a child care worker, and her preferred wording is on the record. However, a clear definition is set out in section 36 of the 2000 Act.

I shall now move on to discuss the Criminal Records Bureau, which has an important role in preventing unsuitable people from working with children and vulnerable adults. The Government are acutely aware of the problems experienced by the bureau, which have caused difficulties for the proper protection of children and other vulnerable groups, but it is important not to allow such problems to detract from the value of the initiative itself.

The CRB is designed to achieve several substantial improvements. First, it will enable information from police records to be made much more widely available to employers, voluntary organisations and others, primarily those working with the vulnerable. Secondly, in respect of working with children, it will be possible to search lists of unsuitable people, which are maintained by my Department and by the Department for Education and Skills. Thirdly, the level and speed of service will be higher than the police have been able to provide in the past. I do not disparage the past record of the police, but resourcing issues apply.

My hon. Friend mentioned the list of registered bodies under the Criminal Records Bureau. If lists were given without consent, it would contravene the Data Protection Act 1998. That is the Government's position, upheld by parliamentary counsel. Consent is a critical issue in a democratic context.

Ms Shipley: What does the Minister think of listed organisations that fail to give consent?

Mr. Lammy: I pass no judgment on the many and varied reasons why organisations may not want their details passed on beyond the CRB, which is charged with that function, to other third parties—including my hon. Friend. The information relating to organisations that give consent is available for inspection on the website or a list can be provided.

My hon. Friend also spoke about compliance checks, but that is not the CRB's function and it is not equipped to carry out that task. The inspection bodies—Ofsted,

the National Care Standards Council and other bodies whose inspection duties include compliance—should rightly take up that function.

Ms Shipley: The Minister used the word "should", so can he confirm that that is the case? Does it actually happen?

Mr. Lammy: I am surprised to hear my hon. Friend ask that question. If she looked at the reports of Ofsted and other inspection bodies, she would see that compliance is examined when schools and hospitals are visited. That is where the duty lies. Action is being taken to address the bureau's operational problems. The bureau, in conjunction with its private sector partner, has put in place a service improvement plan that has already delivered several improvements, and continues to do so.

Action is being taken to address the bureau's operational problems. The bureau, in conjunction with its private sector partner, has put in place a service improvement plan that has already delivered several improvements, and continues to do so. One of the earliest—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. We must now move on to the next debate.

Option 5 Funding (Devon)

1 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): It is fitting that one of the first debates after the return of Parliament should highlight the unfair treatment of Devon schoolchildren in the educational funding that they receive from central Government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for allowing the debate to take place.

The national average spending per pupil in England is £2,567, but a school child in Devon receives only £2,372, which represents a shortfall of £195 per pupil. Devon's 95,896 pupils are getting a raw deal, and the county is being deprived of £18 million per annum. If one multiplies £195 by 95,896, one gets a total of £18 million, so we are receiving £18 million less than the average county.

Last June, the Government issued a consultation paper on local government finance. Consultation on the document ended on 30 September. As part of the review, several options for change in education funding were proposed. The debate provides the opportunity to put the unfair and inequitable system of educational finance right once and for all.

The Government do not like discrimination, and neither do the Opposition. I do not like the postcode lottery in the health service or discrimination in education funding based on which county people live in. The current system for the funding of local education depends on a variety of factors. The Minister must excuse me if I am unclear on the matter—he may be an expert on it, but I am not. However, as I understand them, the factors are as follows: 26 per cent. relates to the number of pupils in schools within the local education authority area; 37 per cent. relates to the number of pupils in the catchment area; 10 per cent. relates to sparsity and reflects the added cost of school transport; and 27 per cent. is based on additional educational needs for deprived areas, which takes into account poor language skills and parents on income support.

The Government have proposed four options for the funding of education in the consultation paper. Regrettably, those options continue to discriminate against schools, pupils and teachers in Devon. Of the four options, only option 2 has a small financial advantage for Devon; the other three would make the funding gap considerably worse for Devon and would mean that the shortfall per pupil was even greater than £195. However, option 2 would result in £2 million of additional funding, which would translate to an additional £21 per annum per pupil. That would reduce the shortfall to £174—but there would still be a shortfall. The four options proposed by the Government still provide Devon with less money than the average county.

The consultation document introduces the concept of using the working families tax credit as a measure of deprivation. That is most welcome, as it recognises the effect of low pay on educational needs and the fact that the number of people on income support is not the only measure of financial deprivation in an area.

In conjunction with the F40 group of the lowest funded LEAs, I ask the Minister to consider a fifth option, which could be an improved version of option 2,

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and would achieve a fair financial settlement for Devon schoolchildren. The Government claim to be spending more money than ever on education since they came to power. Fine. Well done. I am all for it. However, option 5 would provide a more equitable funding system by shifting from the additional educational needs criteria towards a basic allowance per pupil. For those who say that that would be unfair, especially as the additional educational needs criteria deal with those who are more vulnerable, I would point out that there are real problems with the criteria.

An independent study by PricewaterhouseCoopers shows that the average funding given to a school to support a child with additional educational needs is £1,150. However, some £550 of that can be provided through what is called unmet needs, which is neither defined nor subject to any scrutiny; it is simply a wish list that allows the local education authority to claim more money from the Government, whether the child needs it or not. That sounds like gobbledegook, and that is where the problem lies—the present criteria are gobbledegook. Additional educational needs funding should be made available entirely on a needs basis, set out and scrutinised by the Government. It should be excluded from the general education funding formula.

The consultation paper did not offer any solution or mention the problems of funding for school transport. Only 10 per cent. of the Government's block education grant is dedicated to that under the heading of sparsity. Yet Devon has more roads than Belgium, and less public transport than almost any other county. It spends over £16 million a year of its education budget on transportation to and from school. If it did not do that it would contravene the Education Act twice—first by not getting the children to their schools and secondly by not providing full-time education. The matter has been festering since 1944.

Option 5, backed by the F40 campaign, has the support of Devon's parents, governors, teachers and teaching union representatives and councillors, over 200 Members of Parliament and all Devon MPs, whatever their political affiliation. My postbag has been overflowing for the past few weeks with hundreds of letters from concerned parties, who are desperate for a change in what they recognise to be a totally unfair system. In July, a delegation of teachers and parents, led by the admirable Helen Nicholls, head teacher of South Brent primary school in my constituency, presented a 60,000-name petition to the Prime Minister, when he accidentally came out of the door of No. 10.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman intends to mention the fact that it took less than a week to get those 60,000 names. Had we had slightly longer, the number would have doubled.

Mr. Steen: Well, we can put that right. If the Government feel that it would be helpful, I am sure that we can oblige. Miss Nicholls gained the Prime Minister's attention and he listened carefully to her explanation of the fact that the system of funding penalises Devon's children. The Government, like others, listen carefully; we hope that that listening will yield some productive and constructive results.

There are 95,896 pupils in primary and secondary schools in Devon. An increase of £195 per pupil, bringing them up to the national average, would result in a net increase of just over £18.5 million a year to the education budget. The practical difference that option 5 would make would be in the provision of funding to cover the immense burden faced by Devon in transporting pupils from home to school—some £16 million. For an average secondary school in Devon, that would mean an extra £250,000 that could be translated into 16 classroom assistants or eight teachers. That would be a godsend for Stephen Jones, the head teacher of King Edward VI community college—KEVICC—in Totnes, who is beside himself with concern as to how he will manage under the present financial arrangements. For an average primary school of around 200 pupils, with six or seven teachers, it would mean an increase of around £40,000 per annum. That money would pay for an extra teacher or two classroom assistants, dramatically reducing the pressure on the existing teachers. Dartington Church of England primary school has almost double the average number of students in Devon. Its head teacher, Annie Tempest, would be over the moon if extra money were to come her way each year.

In Devon, as I believe that the Minister knows, standard attainment test results in both primary and secondary schools, as well as GCSE results, are consistently higher than the national average. That is thanks to the dedication of the teachers and the quality of the students. I should also mention the outstanding contribution of that talented county councillor, John Hart, who, as executive portfolio holder for education, has put education above politics. All schools in Devon follow a national curriculum and national targets for pupil attainments. They work hard to meet national political expectations, employ staff on national pay scales and purchase additional resources from national educational companies, but Devon does not receive equal national funding. An increase in funding to the average level per pupil in England through option 5 would ensure that Devon schools could build on the excellent standards that they have achieved and make rapid progress. Conservative Members believe in excellence—in the highest common denominator—not in trying to level downwards to the lowest common denominator.

In a House of Commons debate on 26 April 1999, the present Secretary of State rightly stated that this Government are committed to fair funding for all schools and to a process of phasing out unfair funding. That is just what we wanted to hear, and no doubt the review will give her the opportunity to put things right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Before we proceed, several hon. Members have made arrangements with the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) and with the Minister to make contributions. It may help them to gauge the length of their contributions if I say that it is desirable that the Minister be called to speak not later than 1.22 pm.

1.11 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on the case that he made on behalf of Devon schools, which I completely endorse.

I want to pick up a couple of points. First, my hon. Friend rightly spelt out the critical situation of the Devon local education authorities in having to provide for school transport in a large rural county. A letter from the Department in August, in response to a chairman of governors in my constituency, stated:

"We know that pupils from poor backgrounds generally achieve worse results than those from more affluent backgrounds and that it costs more to educate them to the same level. So poverty is one of the pupil characteristics that we want to take into account in drawing up the new funding system."

I do not think anyone would disagree with that statement, but if one of the criteria for determining affluence and poverty is to be car ownership, I should tell the Minister that although car ownership in Tiverton and Honiton—my very rural and not very wealthy part of Devon—is one of the highest in the country, the two and three-car families mostly own old bangers, not new Mercedes, and so on. I hope that the Minister will analyse carefully the rather rigid criteria that determine affluence and poverty.

Secondly, there are schools with genuine problems that the Minister's Department would not determine as being in areas of poverty. Earlier in the year, I wrote to him about one such school, Uffculme, a school for 11-to-16 year olds, saying that it could not meet its statutory requirements now, never mind under the proposals for changes in the formula, but the Minister declined to meet my local education authority, the school and me. I raised the matter in the summer Adjournment debate and I hope that the Minister will reconsider my request, not least out of courtesy to a Member of Parliament. If good schools in areas not deemed to be of known poverty fail to meet their statutory requirements—we are not talking about a sink school, but about an excellent school—I hope that the Minister will take into account the difficulties they are suffering.

1.13 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I shall limit my brief remarks to the issue of village schools, of which there are many scattered throughout the county of Devon. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Totnes (Mr. Steen) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on the points that they made.

I know the Minister to be a reasonable man who is probably very sympathetic to the cases being made today; however, it is not the Minister's Department but the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that will decide on the new funding formula and I hope that the Minister will put our comments robustly to the Deputy Prime Minister.

By and large, educating children in small village schools in Devon is a success story, but the cost of so doing is significantly higher than educating children in urban areas. The cost of school transport has already been covered excellently by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes. The cost of maintaining old buildings is a serious issue and the cost of providing many local services—people have to travel large distances—can also be higher, yet the quality of education that many of Devon's primary school pupils receive is of the highest level. Our village schools produce not just excellent standards but young citizens who have a responsible, informed approach to society, most of whom will go on to become responsible adults and play an active role in this country.

Village schools hold local communities together. They are what parents want, and their existence is vital in maintaining those communities. However, they cost more, not less. That the children of Devon receive £195 a head less to maintain their education than children in other areas creates a huge problem.

I was part of the delegation—I believe that all colleagues from Devon were there—that handed the petition to the Prime Minister, who listened carefully to the points that Helen Nicholls made to him. That was on 16 July and, as far as I was aware just a few days ago, no reply has been received from Downing street three months later. It is one thing to listen carefully to the points made by responsible senior head teachers from Devon, but it is a pity that Downing street, with all its resources, cannot even find the time to write a letter in response. I hope that that does not sum up the extent to which the Government are listening to the very real concerns of those who live in the countryside.

The countryside has suffered greatly in recent years, as the Minister knows. Farming is in crisis, and we are still trying to recover from the foot and mouth crisis in Devon. It will be another body blow if the fair funding formula is not a vehicle for putting right the shortfall in education funding for the children of Devon. The message to the Minister today is simple: stop the discrimination, give us fair funding, and give us option 5.

1.15 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I shall keep my comments brief, but I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) for securing this debate so early. It is an extraordinarily important debate for all of us who represent constituencies in Devon. Since I have been a Member of this House—just over a year—I have never had so much correspondence on any other subject. I was part of that delegation on 16 July, and I heard the Prime Minister tell Helen Nicholls that he would study the situation carefully and get back to her. I suspect that all Members in the Chamber today overheard that, as did Alastair Campbell who was also there. He will therefore find it difficult to wriggle out of it.

As a fair man, I compare and contrast that lack of a response with a reply from the Minister, to whom I wrote on 30 September. He had the courtesy to reply to me by 6 October, for which I thank him. He gave some hope in that letter, saying that he was open to other ideas and that he would take on board our strong representations for option 5. I hope that that is the case, and that decisions have not already been made.

My constituency has one of the largest secondary colleges—Exmouth community college—in the country. It also has one of the best grammar schools—Colyton grammar school. Each school is affected by the new proposals in its own way, as are all the primary and secondary schools in the more rural areas. I have raised several times in the Chamber the question of rural sparsity and the incredibly high costs of transport in our part of the world. As we have heard, the bill is £17.5 million. In real terms, that means that more than 6 per

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cent. of our education budget is committed before a single child is taught. The Government currently provide £12.8 million towards that, which leaves a gap of £4.7 million. If the cost of school transport were fully funded centrally, that would mean an extra £50 for every pupil in Devon.

That is just one of the points that we seek to highlight. Other factors will be discussed later in this morning's debate. I earnestly hope that the Minister will take on board this cross-party alliance, which represents all primary and secondary school teachers in our part of the world. As David Birch, the principal of Sidmouth college, who now chairs the Devon Association of Secondary Headteachers said:

"We are not asking for special treatment. All we want is a fair deal."

1.18 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): Many congratulations to the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on securing this debate so early. I am happy to engage with him, as I did with one of his colleagues at our meeting last week. I will address the specific issues of sparsity and transport that were raised about the development of the new funding formula, but I also want to present a broader picture.

I start by thanking the hon. Gentleman for his support for the Government's policy of increasing expenditure on schools. I hope that it will not bore him if I at least put that discussion into context by explaining the increased investment in education in Devon. I do not want to trespass into party political territory, but if the hon. Gentleman could also persuade some of his party's education spokesmen that increasing investment is a good idea, he would have not only my thanks but those of his constituents.

I was struck by the figures when they were produced for me. Since the local government reorganisation in 1998, Devon local education authority's expenditure has changed. Its standard spending assessment, which is the key part of local government spending, has increased by about £60 million over four years, which is about 25 per cent. Real-terms funding per pupil from that block has increased from £2,750 per pupil in 1998-99 to £3,220 this year, which is an increase of £470 or 17 per cent. Those figures are rather different from those that the hon. Gentleman gave. I hope that he will accept it if I ask my officials to write to him to explain the disparity so that we can proceed on the basis of similar figures.

Of course, the standard spending assessment is only part of the picture. The amount that Devon receives through the standards fund, which is a central allocation, has increased from £7.6 million in 1998 to more than £26.5 million this year. That money supports a range of features of school improvement.

Those moneys are not the only two categories of increased spending in Devon. Payments from the school standards grant, which is sometimes known as the Chancellor's grant, go directly to head teachers and are announced at the time of the Budget. The grant was introduced two years ago and more than doubled from £3.6 million in 2000-01 to more than £8 million this year. I know that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased by the Chancellor's announcement in the spending review that a typical 250-pupil primary school will receive more than £10,000 more next year due to the increase in the schools standards grant, which is a rise from £40,000 to £50,000. A typical 1,000-pupil secondary school will receive £50,000 more, which is a rise from £115,000 to £165,000. There is much greater investment in Devon's schools.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will be keen to have it on the record that capital investment in Devon, which reached the shameful level of only £13.1 million a year in 1997, was £26.6 million last year and is more than £45 million this year. That includes a private finance initiative project—

Mr. Burnett: We are interested in the present and the future rather than the past.

Mr. Miliband: I understand that and I promise the hon. Gentleman that I shall respond to the points that were made. It is worth putting on the record that the rising spend is being given to every LEA throughout the country. We are discussing how that should be distributed—the spend has gone to Devon.

The main focus of the debate is the local government finance review. Hon. Members know that it is easier and more popular for a Government to announce a review than to announce a review's conclusions because a review gives hope throughout the country but its conclusions do not necessarily meet all expectations.

It is fair to point out that there are strong passions about the local government review throughout the country. The so-called F40 group has circulated many petitions, as have groups in other parts of the country that hold equally strong views. I am meeting representatives of each group and I met the F40 group on 25 September—a head teacher was present although I am not sure whether she was Ms Nicholls. There was a constructive exchange of views and I made it clear that the Government have not made decisions about the final outcome of the local government funding review and that we are listening seriously to consultation.

As the hon. Member for Totnes said, education is only part of the scene. There are four education options but I confirm that they were there for discussion and not simply for choice. We are happy to take representations on other options and I shall address his description of option 5 later.

We would all agree that the current system has problems—the hon. Gentleman said that that dated back to 1944. I hope that we can all agree that we want a fairer and clearer system that is based on clear elements.

Mr. Steen: Before the Minister moves on to the future, may I get his agreement because my figures were somewhat adrift from his? Does he accept that as things stand there is a difference of £195 per pupil between Devon and the average county? Can we at least get that clear?

Mr. Miliband: Those figures are not in my notes. I think that the figures to which the hon. Gentleman referred represent average spend across the primary and secondary sectors relating to other counties. It would not be wise for me to say that I recognise the figures

when I have not seen them. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman to clarify what we are discussing. It is clear that Devon's funding is not above average.

A formula for the future that will command confidence and respect will include a basic entitlement, and will recognise additional educational needs—the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) referred to poverty-related indicators—and the extra costs of running the education system in some parts of the country, including Devon.

The Department for Education and Skills has guaranteed that there will be no real-terms losses as a result of the process. Floors in the system will ensure a real-terms guarantee for LEAs. That is important. The consultation process began on 8 July, just after the presentation of the petition, and closed on 30 September. The options discussed today centre on deprivation and area costs.

I do not wish to breach confidentiality so I cannot announce the outcome of the review today, but let me give the Chamber some idea of the direction of our thinking. We are not limited by the options set out in the consultation paper, but we want to achieve a fairer match between needs—a word used by at least two, possibly three, Opposition Members—and spending. That is not the same as saying that we should set an artificial target for the funding gap between authorities. The F40 campaign's option 5, which is not a distinct option but asks for more of one option and less of another, adds up to taking money from the deprivation element of the formula and putting it into the basic entitlement. That obviously has significant implications for other authorities around the country, but we take seriously the case for a higher basic entitlement. However, Devon will benefit from some of the extra money allocated for additional educational needs.

I appreciate that some areas, such as Devon, have substantial areas of sparse population. That is why we propose that the new formula should contain a sparsity element to reflect the costs of home-to-school transport in rural areas and to help rural primary schools. Let me explain this carefully because the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) raised the subject previously.

Authorities with sparse populations want us to introduce a sparsity factor for secondary schools, too. We have examined the issue in some detail, but we found no evidence of a connection between secondary school size and sparsity. Small schools are as likely to be found in densely populated metropolitan authorities as in shires, such as Devon, but we recognise that secondary school pupils often have to travel further to get to schools in authorities with sparse populations. That is why we examined the transport expenditure of each LEA to assess the impact of sparsity. We estimate that, in the new formula, 60 per cent. of the transport element of the LEA block will be distributed through the sparsity index and 40 per cent. according to the number of pupils living in the authority.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Option 5 is supported by many counties, not just Derbyshire. I know that the Minister has received many representations, and he has told us today that he will consider all of them, but the tight timetable for implementation is causing concern. What consultation period will there be after the Government have put forward their final option, or will it be a matter of take it or leave it?

Mr. Miliband: I give way to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon.

Mr. Burnett: Will the Minister confirm that the Government intend to provide in the formula for primary and secondary school transport?

Mr. Miliband: The consultation on the Government's final proposals will proceed in the usual way for a local government finance settlement in late November, early December. The transport indicator in the LEA block relates to both primary and secondary schools, but the schools block covers only the primary sector.

Finally, on the definition of deprivation, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton referred to the number of cars in a household. I do not know where she got that idea. We made it clear in the consultation paper that there are two options for measuring deprivation. The traditional income support measure includes people on incapacity benefit, so it is a measure of non-employment that targets a particular group of families. However, we flagged up in the consultation paper that we also want to recognise those children who live in working families on low wages. That is an issue in places such as Devon where many rural workers are on low wages. We take that seriously and want to recognise need in a proper not an arbitrary way.

To conclude, this has been a useful debate. I take seriously the points that have been made. However, I reiterate that spend is rising in all LEAs throughout the country. I hope that the Opposition will support us in that.

Crime (North Wales)

1.30 pm

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I shall split my speech into two parts. First, I shall briefly describe my experience on the parliamentary police placement scheme, which I am currently on. Secondly, I shall focus on the crime and disorder partnerships in Denbighshire, which are not working.

Earlier this year, colleagues and I formed a Labour group of north Wales Members of Parliament. The three issues on which we are concentrating are crime, attracting quality jobs to north Wales and improvements to the North Wales railway line. I took up the issue of crime in north Wales as a member of that group.

I am taking part in the parliamentary police placement scheme. The scheme lasts for 25 days, of which I have so far done 18. I have visited dog handlers and the North Wales police helicopter crew, which works with the health service and has saved hundreds of lives since it began. I have worked with the armed response unit and I have been on the firing range at Rhewl in Denbighshire, which is the eighth best in the world. The North Wales police force is very proactive and uses the range to create income for Denbighshire. Indeed, it is doing great things in Ireland and it has got the RUC and the Gardai using the firing range, so it is doing its bit for the peace process. I have also visited the police driving school in Colwyn Bay, in north Wales, which is one of the best in the country. It offers a rolling programme of three-week driving instruction courses for 900 officers, which will make the force's drivers the safest in the UK.

I have spent three days on the beat in Rhyl, in my constituency, three days on the beat in Llandudno, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams), and one day on the Maesgeirchen council estate in Conwy. I have been very impressed by the dedication and commitment of the police officers that I have been with over the past five or six months. Perhaps I was deliberately placed with positive people, but I can honestly say, hand on heart, that I have not met one jaded police officer. In our consultations on issues such as "Justice for All", such police officers will act as a valuable source of information, ensuring that we achieve best practice and tilt the scales of justice away from the criminal and towards the victim.

My experience has helped me as a constituency MP, and I have visited some excellent schemes. The youth offending team in Wrexham is one of the best in Wales. Mobile CCTV cameras can be strapped to a lamppost centre wherever there is a problem in Conwy town, and images can be relayed to police headquarters. They can also be used around the whole of Conwy county. Although the traditional location for CCTV is in the high street, where it is used to look after property, I have also seen it installed on council estates such as the Maesgeirchen estate in Bangor, where crime levels have dropped as a result. There is only one road in, so the police know when a drug dealer comes in and they can identify him.

I have also been impressed by the Conwy houses in multiple occupation team, which takes a joint approach to fighting the problems presented by HMOs, involving not only environmental health officers but fire officers, the police, welfare rights units, social services and education. The whole team is involved, and landlords who do not perform properly or who short-change the county and their tenants will be made to pay, because the team will go through their affairs with a fine-toothed comb.

I believe that my experience will help me in parliamentary debate, which is one of the prime purposes of the scheme. Forty colleagues have been on the parliamentary police placement scheme, including my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy. Perhaps the best thing that I witnessed on the scheme was the Aquarius project, which is run by North Wales police. It is cutting edge stuff. There are 43 police authorities in the UK, and North Wales police are probably No. 1 at using technology and record management systems. They are piloting a Canadian model in north Wales, which I hope will be rolled out throughout the country when it proves successful. That is a Welsh solution to a Welsh problem, and a UK one.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am sure it is a very worthy scheme, but while the hon. Gentleman was on that scheme was it explained to him why the number of specials in north Wales has declined from 388 to just 125, or why violent crime in north Wales has increased by 36 per cent. while detection rates have dropped to 28 per cent.?

Chris Ruane: I am aware of that fact, and I share the hon. Gentleman's concern. That is a snapshot perhaps of the whole of Wales, but in certain parts of Wales—again I refer to Llandudno—there are specials who have been there for 11 years. I was out on a Saturday night at two o'clock in the morning with a special who had been there for 11 years. In areas such as Rhyl—my home town—the number of specials is just one or two. It is a patchwork across north Wales.

On the issue of crime detection and combating crime, I believe the following to be the solution. Within any police authority there are 26 separate silos of information. The Aquarius project will allow the computer to go through those silos and pick out all the relevant information on one household, individual or whatever, and convey that information to the palmtop computer of a police officer going to an incident. It can give a picture of that person. If the officer asks a person who he is, and he says John Jones, or whatever, and gives his name and address, the officer can say, "No you're not—that's John Jones." It is a fantastic system, which will cut down dramatically on bureaucracy. Police officers spend 43 per cent. of their time in the police station. Officers can do reports on their palmtops, which can be sent off to the 17 different points to which they need to be sent. That is a fantastic tool. I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales to come to north Wales and judge that fantastic project for himself.

The next part of my speech concentrates on crime and disorder and it is not a positive tale. I have not got a positive story to tell on crime and disorder partnerships in my constituency in Denbighshire. The partnership is not effective, and it is having a devastating effect on my constituents, especially those in social housing. I would like to give some graphic details of how ordinary people

are terrorised in their own homes, and left without any help or support. I give you the example of a young single mother in my constituency with a nine-year-old daughter, who lived in fear and terror of a local gang who victimised her. They actually urinated over her daughter. The woman went to the council for help, and it told her that she would have to stand up and be counted, go to court and get those people prosecuted. That council is not living in the real world.

I give another example. A family with children aged from five to 13 terrorised a whole street. Their activities went unchecked for two to three years. They drove out an elderly couple who had lived on that estate for 50 years. The house became vacant and the housing association bought it. It put in a single mother with an eleven-year-old son fleeing domestic violence. The antisocial family said that they were going to kill the 11-year-old son. She turned to the council for help. It said that she should stand up and be counted and go to court.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): My hon. Friend has rightly raised antisocial behaviour as a crime, and a very serious one, which blights many of our communities. In my constituency there is a meeting in Sealand tonight to discuss what is happening at St. Andrew's church. That church is being targeted by young vandals, who are not only destroying the church but attacking the people who visit it, and putting them in a terrible state. We have antisocial behaviour orders. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should use them more than we are at the moment?

Chris Ruane: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I will come on to the issue of antisocial behaviour orders in a moment.

After her 11-year-old son's life was threatened, the young mother left the house immediately. She had spent £1,500 on fixtures and fittings in her house, but she left it and had to go back to a violent relationship. She went to the council and asked it to rehouse her. It told her that there was nothing immediately available, and she had to wait for nine months before she was rehoused. When a council house in my constituency becomes empty, the council is prepared to spend vast sums of money on boarding up the house with steel frames, repairing the smashed porcelain and replacing the systems that have been taken out. According to figures supplied to me this morning, it spends £40,000 a year on one estate, on boarding up and repairing houses and on lost rents. I would say that that sum, for that one estate, would be better spent employing two or three dedicated officers with the job of combating crime. That £40,000 is a year-on-year cost, which, I believe, will escalate.

Figures supplied by the local county council this morning are inaccurate. They tell me that an average of four houses are boarded up on that estate, but there were 16 in June, and eight at 11.30 am today when I sent a councillor round to investigate. I am currently making inquiries about something that I have been told—that houses have been repaired and that young hooligans have then gone in and re-trashed them. That has happened on five occasions, and police were informed only on the fourth. That is not partnership in Denbighshire.

I have suggested to the council that if it knows that a council house is becoming empty, it should work around the current tenant and hand over the keys on the day on which the tenant moves out. If major work is needed, it should have workmen in there, working through the night if necessary and, again, hand the keys over. For the 2,000 people on the council house waiting list who are desperate for homes, that seems a sensible measure to cut down vandalism and the cost of repair, and to re-invest in the community.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the major concerns in north Wales is the absence of police at night on the streets where rowdy behaviour and vandalism occur? I am thinking in particular of areas in Llandudno, Llandudno Junction, Conwy, Penmaenmawr and Llanfairfechan, which I know my hon. Friend has visited.

Chris Ruane: Absolutely. Police numbers are important, but I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that in 1997 there were 1,300 officers in the North Wales police; there are now 1,500. We must ensure that the extra officers going in are frontline officers. I refer again to the Aquarius project, which I believe will help to achieve that.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that the money that councils such as Wrexham spend on youth offending teams to nip such behaviour by young people in the bud is much better spent than the money that he has described as being used for boarding up houses and so on?

Chris Ruane: Absolutely. I referred earlier to the excellent example of the youth offending team in Wrexham. That is a more positive, proactive measure and it saves money and, more importantly, communities.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Will the hon. Gentleman be interested, as I will be, to hear what the Minister has to say about how the causes of crime are being addressed? Much of what he says is about enforcement, but enforcement will cure only symptoms, not causes.

Chris Ruane: Yes. That is my point. It is no good sending police officers to those estates to chase young criminals round. The answer is a co-operative partnership approach involving the social services, education, housing, the police, the local community, the MP and the Welsh Assembly Member. The problem must be looked at in the round. I shall give a graphic example in a moment of how that has failed in my constituency.

I suggested four years ago that such a measure should take place—that houses should be repaired straight away to cut down on antisocial behaviour. The county council never took up the suggestion. It has a range of weapons in its armoury to combat antisocial behaviour. It can use strong tenancy agreements, rigorously implemented. There has been, I think, only one eviction due to antisocial behaviour in my constituency. Evictions should not simply take place in the first instance. We should give help and support to those vulnerable families, but if that fails, fails and fails again, eviction should be considered. I do not think that it has been used as a powerful weapon. Antisocial behaviour

[Chris Ruane]

contracts and antisocial behaviour orders could be used. Not one single antisocial behaviour order has been used in my constituency.

I have highlighted the financial cost to the council, but a greater human cost is borne by people who live on the estates and watch their communities being torn apart through inaction. That inaction helps to breed current and future crime by failing to tackle boarded-up houses and burning houses and cars. The council is creating mini-adventure playgrounds within those estates, where kids—from five-year-olds to 15-year-olds—are able to get away with crime. With each burning, young children become emboldened, learn the tricks of the trade from older children and become toughened for a life of crime.

Two years ago, a serious incident occurred in the north of the county in which a police officer was hospitalised after she was set upon by young thugs. I called a meeting, and the county council responded positively. It was represented at the meeting, along with senior officers, and £20,000 was thrown into the pot to tackle the problem. A working group was set up, which met every three months and at which action minutes were taken and reported back on—I attended the last meeting in January—and local councillors thought that we were going forward. Then, in March this year, a letter was sent from the chief executive's department stating that because the initiative had been so successful and crime on the estate had fallen, the council had decided to end the partnership. That is not an example of a working partnership; there was no consultation with people involved in the group. Consequently, in June this year a house and two cars were set alight—not on the outskirts, but in the middle of the estate, so that black, swirling smoke circulated around it. What sort of message does that send out to that community? It says, "We don't care that you are by yourselves; as long as you are paying your rent, we're happy." That can no longer be tolerated.

The view that the partnership in Denbighshire is not working is shared not only by me and the majority of my constituents but by the Home Office. The Minister will be aware that the west ward of Rhyl is one of the five wards in the UK that has become a designated policing priority area. The main theme of the report on the policing priority area was that better partnership is needed, with commitment from the top and sufficient resources and staffing. Partnerships, especially at community level, must be supported—training and secretarial help is required. That is not happening, and some members of the local crime and disorder partnerships are tearing their hair out because of the lack of progress. When I contacted the police standards unit yesterday, I was told that meetings held with the Minister responsible for the police included senior representation from Denbighshire county council and the police. That was not the case when workshops on the nitty-gritty of the partnerships were held. Senior police officers attended, but council officials did not. Commitment is needed both at the strategic and the working levels. Three weeks ago, the police and the county council agreed to a joint operation to crack down on late night fast food outlets in Rhyl, where there is a great deal of associated violence, but on Thursday it was called off unilaterally by the council. That is not participation.

Modern crime strategies look to sport to create positive diversionary activities for young people. I am conducting surveys across my constituency, on council estates and beyond, and those communities are crying out for sports facilities so that youth can be diverted into positive activities away from a life of crime. I shall give an example from my county. For two years, I participated in a sports partnership to develop a £4.5 million bid for much-needed sporting facilities in Rhyl, the largest town in my constituency. We worked away, drew up outline plans and garnered facts and figures. In the middle of the summer recess of 2001, we received a letter saying that the bid had been cancelled because it did not have the county council's support—despite the fact that it would look after young people right next to the poorest ward in Wales. The council unilaterally pulled the plug on the first phase, and a £1.5 million lottery application was ended without any consultation with the partners. A similar story can be told in Prestatyn, where a tennis courts complex was lost to a neighbouring town.

Denbighshire council often claims that it does not have the finances for those initiatives, but £600,000 of "communities first" money set aside in Cardiff for the west and south-west wards of Rhyl has remained unclaimed for the past year. Those communities are crying out for that money to be used through crime and disorder partnerships to create sports facilities, but it has not been claimed. Rhyl West is the poorest of the 865 council wards in Wales, but it has not received one penny piece of the money because the council has not drawn it down. The situation is so serious that the Assembly Member for the Vale of Clwyd, Ann Jones, has raised the matter with the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities, Edwina Hart, who has had to intervene in the matter.

I have raised a local issue from a local perspective to show that crime and disorder partnerships are not working, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that they are properly monitored. Currently, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary looks at the input of the police while the district auditor looks at the input of the county council or local authority; they do not use common timetables, standards or formats. I ask him to take the issue back to the Home Office and the National Assembly for Wales in order for one team using a common format to look at crime and disorder partnerships in the round. That team's report should be readily understood by the public to allow them to identify which partnerships are working and which are not both in their local authority and between local authorities. If partnerships are not working, the public can then get involved in the democratic process and put pressure on the Assembly Member, the council, the police and me.

I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to visit North Wales to look at the Aquarius project and talk to people on estates in my county and constituency to find out how they feel about crime and disorder.

1.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) on securing the debate. The issue is important and it is good that it has been aired this afternoon.

At the outset of my remarks, it is important to make it clear that recorded crime in Wales is down by 16.4 per cent. since 1997. Although we can congratulate ourselves on that, there is no reason to be complacent. The Government will not be complacent because we are determined to reduce both crime and the fear of crime. I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises that the fear of crime is often a great problem, particularly among older people, and we have to be careful about the perceptions that we create. I recently took part in a BBC programme, which produced a poll that showed that 20 per cent. of people over the age of 55 were afraid to go out after dark. The fact that 80 per cent. of such people—four out of five—were not afraid was lost. The perception created by the discussion was that people over 55 were afraid to go out after dark.

Research consistently shows that a sensible approach using a variety of crime reduction methods is the most effective way in which to improve our communities. I know from my constituency experience that partnerships between the community, the police, the local authority and others are the most effective way of building more stable communities, reducing crime and engaging young people who are perhaps involved in criminal activities. Too often, there is a problem on a particular estate because kids are gathering and causing grief, nuisance and upset to local people, and along come the police who move them from one end of the village to the other. That does not cure the problem. The only way in which we are going to tackle it is to engage with young people by giving them ownership and finding solutions with them.

Police officers must, of course, be on the beat, and I take my hon. Friend's point that that is very important. Police numbers are now at a record high in Wales, with 7,193 officers, and, as he pointed out, North Wales in particular has had extra officers. We must ensure, however, that those officers are actually out on the beat. The planned introduction of 1,000 community support officers will help to raise the police's profile. Chief constables now have the power to accredit organisations' employees in the same way as community support officers in order to raise the visibility of policing. The use of civilians in police stations will also be of benefit because that will hopefully allow more officers to go out on the beat.

My hon. Friend made a number of points about the good practices and technologies that are being used in the Aquarius project in north Wales, but we must not get away from the fact that too much of police officers' time is spent on paperwork. The recent study "Diary of a police officer" clearly demonstrated that too much time was spent on paperwork and not enough out on the beat.

I welcome the point that my hon. Friend made about the introduction of information technology and palm computers. I know how successful palm computers have been, and I would be pleased to go up to north Wales at his invitation to see them, and also to talk about the crime reduction partnerships that cause him concern in Denbighshire. I am delighted that North Wales police are at the vanguard of investing in a general packet radio spectrum link, which means that information can be transferred from existing mobile communication systems four times faster than at present. Clearly, that is the sort of benefit that investment in new technology will bring.

Since the introduction of the crime reduction programme for England and Wales in 1999, £22 million has gone into crime and disorder reduction partnerships in Wales. The investment is important, but we must see outcomes if we are to make progress. I am aware that many such partnerships work well, but if there are difficulties in the one to which my hon. Friend referred, I will ensure that his comments are brought to the attention of my colleagues in the Home Office. Again, I accept his invitation to go to north Wales to discuss the matter with him.

The first set of statutory local crime and disorder reduction strategies have been reviewed, and new strategies will be put in place for 2005. Several other initiatives such as CCTV, neighbourhood watch schemes and anti-domestic violence projects also contribute to reducing crime and building more stable communities. Some £2.8 million will go into partnerships this year in the communities against drugs programme. In my hon. Friend's area, as in mine, there are no doubt serious problems with drug misuse, and we have to put in serious resources to tackle them.

Good partnerships have been funded in Ynys Môn, and £30,000 went towards a shopwatch scheme in Holyhead and Llangefni. Total bids submitted by Wales for the second round of funding under the scheme are around £772,000. The bids have been put in, and money will be forthcoming as we develop the schemes. We await further announcements on them.

It is also important that we consider some of the causes of anti-social behaviour and crime in our communities. Drug and alcohol misuse is a major factor. I have seen that in my constituency, as I am sure that my hon. Friend has in his. To tackle that, we need to work through strategies with agencies, the voluntary sector, local authorities and the police. I am pleased that the Wrexham community safety partnership has impressively led the way in Wales through its use of anti-social behaviour orders. The powers exist to impose ASBOs so ASBOs should be used, and far more frequently than at present.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Will the Minister also commend the initiative taken by the Communities First group in Wrexham? It works to involve young people who are not involved in crime in the planning of youth facilities in difficult areas in the town. The idea is to ensure that young people do not slip into crime, by providing adequate facilities for them to use before they become involved in it.

Mr. Touhig: My hon. Friend makes an important point. All too often, we on the outside in government, the police or local authorities tend to think that we have to impose solutions on communities. We need to consider ideas from the communities themselves, so that they have ownership of the projects. That can provide much greater benefits, as I am sure he will agree.

Partnerships work well in sharing best practice in many parts of the country. It is important that we build on those good practices. Acceptable behaviour contracts can often be issued. They are a last chance before ASBOs, and sometimes they do the trick. They are another tool in the armoury of partnerships to tackle antisocial behaviour. Denbighshire local council has

[Mr. Touhig]

drawn up about 15 such contracts, as I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) is aware. Their effectiveness will depend on the response from the wider community in support of the efforts of the police and partnerships.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): When the Minister goes to north Wales, will he ask the chief constable, Richard Brunstrom, why he seems so intent on magnifying the number of speed cameras in north Wales? The Minister has rightly talked about the anti-social problems of violence, damage and muggings. Why is there not a huge concentration on that? Why has there been such a decline in detection rates in north Wales?

Mr. Touhig: The police have made considerable effort in north Wales, but I take the point. [*Interruption.*] As one of my colleagues has just said, speed kills. It is important that we get that message across to those who have campaigned about speed cameras. Speed reduction in urban areas saves lives.

I have also been pleased about the on-the-spot fines that have been introduced in north Wales. The fines of £40 and £80 are working effectively, and are getting the right message across. I am aware of the project in the west ward of Rhyl to which my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd referred. It has been greatly beneficial, and I would like to see it continue. It has widespread local support.

Many good initiatives have taken place in north Wales. We have to ensure that the partnership that we have put in place is properly reviewed and kept under scrutiny, and that it works effectively. If there are deficiencies such as those that my hon. Friend pointed out, we must get together to overcome them and put them right.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 16 October 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Second Hub Airport (South East)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Derek Twigg.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

On 23 July, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions made the most significant Government statement on air travel for a generation. Sadly, at the same time he gave us the shortest possible consultation period in which to reply. There is little time for hon. Members to debate or effectively represent our constituents' interests in this vital matter. That is one of the key reasons why I sought this debate almost immediately after the Secretary of State had sat down in July.

Like you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituents have a direct interest in the issue. They were shocked by the sheer scale of the planned development that was announced for Stansted. What is proposed is not simply another terminal or perhaps a few more routes, but the replacement of Stansted as a low-cost, point-to-point airport, with what could be the largest international airport in the world—effectively twice the size of Heathrow today.

In practical terms, for my constituents such enlargement would mean an eight-fold increase in passenger numbers, a five-fold increase in the number of planes, the demolition of more than 300 homes, the loss of two villages, the destruction of 64 grade II listed buildings and the loss of 1,200 hectares of green fields. It would also mean the blighting by noise of more than 28,000 more homes—the equivalent of a town the size of Bishop's Stortford. It would involve up to 300,000 new journeys per day on an already over-stretched road and rail network. In short, the Government's proposals for Stansted would irrevocably change not only our landscape—important though that is—but our community. The development would be wholly unsustainable in that location.

My colleagues here today feel as passionately about the issue as I do, and so we should. It is our duty to stand up and speak on behalf of the communities that we represent. I also feel that we must examine the wider question facing the south-east. Even if the Government can prove that a new hub is needed, how do we ensure that the investment delivers the maximum social, economic and environmental benefits for the region? Regrettably, the Government have failed to establish clearly to those of us who live in the south-east the positive reasons why we need a second hub. In the documents that we have seen to date, there is certainly a lot about the needs of air travellers and airlines, but precious little about the needs of the residents and the benefits to them. In his reply, I hope that the Minister will set out clearly the social, economic and environmental case for a new hub and explain why he and his colleagues strongly support such an option.

I do not intend to engage in the argument about future demand for air travel or whether it is desirable for that to be constrained in some manner. Over the past 30 years, air travel has grown at approximately 6 per cent. per annum. As a result, in the south-east, the traffic in the air today is approximately five times greater than it was in the 1970s. The Government's plans for the next 30 years, which are based on average growth of a little more than 3 per cent. per annum for the south-east, do not seem wholly unrealistic. I am not an expert in the field, so I do not know whether the figures are right; they must be examined by the experts. I am sure that the Minister will allow an independent view of the subject. However, I suspect that those views on the numbers and the likely growth in air traffic for the south-east are about right.

Given the likely growth, and the limits of Heathrow's natural capacity, there is a danger that, in the long term, London and the south-east could fall behind their European competitors. If the need for investment is proven, we must ask how and where it should be made in order to maximise the benefits for the country and for those in the south-east.

Let us consider London and the south-east as an economic community. However we compare the two sides of London and the south-east—whether through jobs, literacy, family stability or crime rates—historically, there has been an imbalance within the region, an east-west divide. In the past century, London's money and decision-makers, and those who could get up and go, have got up and gone west. In the past 20 years, that behaviour has spread, and people have gone to the north and the south. However, there is still a sense that the area due east of London, along the lower east Thames, is being neglected, and that the decision-makers are facing west and have their back to the east. The result is an overheated, congested region that is struggling to cope.

We are all aware that house prices are rising in London and the south-east. The land values in the west and the east that underpin those house prices often differ by £1 million to £1.5 million an acre. In my county of Hertfordshire, for example, we are desperately short of key workers, and one of the critical reasons for that is that they cannot afford to live there. A hub airport, and all its attendant development, would simply exacerbate the problem if it were wrongly located, but in the right place, it could revive an area. It could act as a vital magnet for jobs, and could induce economic development. I hope that, in the consultation process, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will make a clear assessment of the attendant induced economic development, which I have yet to see mentioned with any clarity in the documents.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk). I follow his argument, and accept all that he has said. Would he care to reflect on the fact that if another hub airport were built elsewhere and there was no scope for two hub airports, taking hub status away from the existing hub airport could cause serious economic problems for the local community? Might not

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the overheating to which he refers happen to an area simply because there is a hub airport there, and the difficulty to the east of London be due to the fact that there was no hub there? Would we not perhaps be switching around the problems and the advantages?

Mr. Prisk: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. There is a danger. One need only see the congestion and the problems in the Heathrow area. The imbalance in the south-east is sufficient for there to be significant advantage in having a similar facility on the east side of London. I understand that those who live in and around the Heathrow area feel, as do many in my constituency, that the area has reached capacity.

If there is to be a new hub, we have to decide where it will be. Having thought about the subject, I think that there is a strong case for considering the lower east Thames and what is now known as the Thames gateway area. I am aware that the Government have chosen to highlight one site, the Cliffe site. I do not take that narrow approach; I believe that there are other options, although, of course, there could be some advantages to locating an airport at Cliffe.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Given that the Cliffe site would be only about 2000 yd from the boundary of my constituency and would impose massive noise, air and light pollution, as well as environmental damage on my constituency, is it not extraordinary that the Government have not sought to consult my constituents on the matter? Does not that reveal the Government's total contempt for the people of Essex?

Mr. Prisk: I entirely sympathise with my hon. Friend, not least because the consultation period is short and has been woefully prepared. Many of my constituents feel that the documents have been issued somewhat late. When the Government choose to hold an exhibition on the Stansted area on the Friday of the August bank holiday, and fail to inform either of the relevant Members of Parliament about it, it is clear that not only the hon. Gentleman's constituents are suffering; we all are. I hope the Minister will respond to that point later.

If we are to have such a hub airport in the lower east Thames area, we must consider the potential benefits, of which, I believe, there are several. First, it could provide a genuine hub for growth in the poorest part of east London. It could improve transport around London and to and from Europe. It could ensure that, for the first time in this country, we have a genuine 24-hour a day airport, with the significant benefits for freight traffic that that would bring. It could enable significant household development, especially for affordable and key worker housing, which, as I mentioned, is lacking. It would allow us economically to develop many brownfield sites and help to rebalance growth and development in the south-east, not least by reducing pressure on overcongested areas.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is my hon. Friend aware that the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority, Sir Roy McNulty, has said unequivocally in public that the development of a new airport at the Cliffe site, and presumably any other site reasonably close to it, would have an unacceptable impact on the whole air traffic control system? That must negate the benefits of any reasonable development in that location.

Mr. Prisk: As I said, I wanted us to have this debate so that we could air information. I have not seen that statement and I would appreciate it if my hon. Friend would bring it to my attention. However, contrary views have been expressed, which is why I believe that the consultation period should not be so short. If we are to make the right decision, we need a long period in which to consider the matter properly. Four months is inadequate.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): The assumptions behind the hon. Gentleman's propositions may be seriously flawed. He thinks that an airport at the Cliffe site could create extra regeneration for the Thames gateway. There is strong feeling, however, that the burden on the existing infrastructure and increased congestion in that whole part of north Kent would make it difficult for the gateway to operate effectively as a thoroughfare for prosperity between this country and elsewhere, with the result that his constituents, too, would suffer from the damage to the national economy that an airport at Cliffe would create.

Mr. Prisk: I have heard opinions on both sides, but when one considers such issues as employment and literacy, one sees that there is an imbalance, which I want to address.

Hon. Members have rightly focused on the Cliffe site, although, as I said earlier, that is the Government's option, not mine. A coastal or offshore airport would enable planes to fly over the water and not over our roofs. There are safety issues, although they can, perhaps, be overstated, but we should not ignore the importance of minimising noise pollution. Such an airport would fit in with the Government's regional planning goals, as well as with those of most London local authorities. Indeed, it is an approach already adopted by SASIG—the Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group—which represents 75 local authorities and 23 million people, so that option should not be easily dismissed.

I appreciate that an offshore or coastal airport is a more expensive option, although that is more an issue for the investor than for the Government. However, judging by what has happened overseas, that option seems to be the way ahead. In Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, they are building new airports on the coast or offshore. Indeed, we need look no further than Hong Kong and the new Chep Lap Kok airport, which was designed by a Brit—Sir Norman Foster—and developed with the direct support of the British Government. It is stunning airport to look at, only 23 minutes from downtown Hong Kong, and we helped to build it.

Mr. Wilshire: Is my hon. Friend aware that the success of the new airport in Hong Kong is based on the closure of the airport that served as a hub for some time?

Mr. Prisk: My hon. Friend is a good representative of his constituents, because he is ensuring that his argument about Heathrow is reinforced. I commend him for that.

I return to the question of Hong Kong and the argument for offshore airports. I understand the point about proximity made by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink). Given that the Thames estuary occupies 400 square miles, there must be a case for considering the option. I hope that, in line with the Secretary of State's remarks of 23 July, the Minister will confirm that the Government's mind is not closed on the matter and that they are prepared to consider all reasonable options. If the British Government can contribute to the construction of an airport of that nature in Hong Kong, I cannot understand why they cannot do so here.

In conclusion, it is widely recognised that aviation policy over the past 30 years has been one of make do and mend. Indeed, many of the decisions cobbled together over the past 30 years by both Labour and Conservative Governments are constraining us today. The Government need to recognise how we went wrong in the past and that the decision about the type of airport that we build has as much to do with the social, environmental and economic well being of an area as with aviation policy.

We are all aware of the problems in the south-east. If the Government make the right decision on airport policy, they will have in their grasp a powerful tool, which could transform the poorest part of London, create a modern transport network and improve the lives of everyone in the south-east. That represents a wonderful opportunity, and I hope that the Government have the courage to grasp it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is possible that not everyone present with an interest in the matter will have an opportunity to speak, for reasons of time. I appeal to hon. Members to be as brief as they can so that as many different points of view as possible are represented.

9.47 am

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): As hon. Members will know, Heathrow is in my constituency, so I have a heartfelt interest in the subject. Some people want to portray those opposed to a third runway at Heathrow or Stansted as opposed to the aviation industry, but that is not the case. Many of my constituents work at Heathrow; some of those at risk of losing their homes as a result of the third runway work at Heathrow and have a direct interest in the long-term development and viability of the aviation industry.

Our consistent view, which should also be the consistent view of the Government, is that aviation policy should be in the interests of the whole community and should focus on the long-term, rather than on short-term profit. It should balance the economic benefits with the environmental and social impact of any developments.

I shall speak briefly about the consultation process, which was seriously flawed and has excited some anger among hon. Members and members of the community. It is unacceptable to have a consultation period of only four months on a proposal that could have an impact on a population of 3 million people. The period was to be six months, but the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions remembered that there were local government elections in London and curtailed the process. The consultation took place over the summer recess, and individual consultation exercises have not been advertised locally. Hon. Members have had to advertise them themselves. That is how the consultation has been carried out. The questionnaire is also dubious.

Mr. Wilshire: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has been having the same difficulties as I have. Is he aware that the Department concerned said that it had sent letters, placed advertisements in local newspapers, and done all sorts of other things? If he is, has he discovered where it did all that, because I have not?

John McDonnell: Like the hon. Gentleman, I know of no such advertising. The only advertising of which I am aware in my constituency is that which local residents, the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) and I generated. Let us be clear: the roadshows were a farce. Even the experts sent to staff the roadshows had inadequate information and were not sufficiently expert to respond to many of the questions that my constituents put to them. May I suggest to the Minister and to the Secretary of State that, to make the consultation real, Ministers should be out in the constituencies convening public meetings so that they can hear the views of constituency MPs and local residents who will be affected. It is time for Ministers to get out on the stump to hear what people are saying. My constituents are coming to Parliament today to express their frustration at not being allowed to have their say. The debate on the future of airport strategy has been restricted, lacks transparency, and appears to be a charade.

We need a genuine and open debate. Is there a need for greater airport capacity in the south-east? Is there a need for a new airport rather than the incremental internal development of existing airports at the expense of our environment and communities? Arguments exist that challenge the need for expansion. There are questions to be asked about the growth figures. I would welcome the Government commissioning an independent and transparent study of the growth projections in the consultation papers. There needs to be discussion and an independent evaluation of the economic benefits provided by the proposals, as they have been contested for some time. It is also time that we revisited the debate about the subsidy that the taxpayer gives to the aviation industry. Estimates published this month identify a £7.5 billion subsidy in taxation exemptions by the Government to the aviation industry in 2000, which is projected to rise to £16 billion in 2020. That means that on average, my constituents and all those in the south-east are donating £550 a year to the aviation industry. That should be part of any long-term and sound debate from which a rational policy for aviation in the south-east would develop.

If we accept that there is a need to expand, there is a long-term need for a new airport. My greatest anxiety is that the Government will plant on us new runways at Heathrow, Stansted, and eventually Gatwick. They may tinker around with Cliffe, but I believe that Cliffe is a red herring. I will return to that point. They will come back for a new airport in 10 years' time, having imposed those new runways. It will end up being more expensive and

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have a greater social and environmental impact because of the lack of long-term infrastructure planning. That is the nightmare. It is a nightmare for my constituents and the reason why we need a longer term plan rather than just another runway at Heathrow.

I hope that my colleagues will be able to outline the implications for their constituents. Despite what the consultation paper says, the implications for my constituents of the map in the consultation document are that the five villages surrounding Heathrow will be lost. Some 4,000 homes will go. Those figures are not mine, but are from the original Government consultation—the RUCATSE or Runway Capacity to Serve the South East study—in 1992. Some 10,000 local residents will be forcibly moved from their homes. Three primary schools will be closed and demolished, and two medieval churches will be flattened. The largest surviving medieval barn in western Europe will go. Village greens, community centres, swimming pools and children's playgrounds will be lost, as will green belt land. What is most offensive to my constituents is that the path of the third runway runs over Harmondsworth church and cemetery. My constituents are being asked to exhume the bodies of their relatives who are buried in Harmondsworth church. Some are in war graves and that is unacceptable at any price for the aviation industry.

My constituents believe that they have done enough for the economic benefit of the aviation industry and sacrificed enough for the economy of the country.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I am pleased to know how strongly my hon. Friend feels about this matter. He is obviously representing his constituents very effectively. Does he appreciate that whereas increasing capacity at Heathrow would cause the problems he suggests, building an airport at Cliffe would cause significant environmental damage, albeit not on the same scale? It would certainly have a major impact on the local environment and on the local transport problems that we already face?

John McDonnell: I shall address that matter in due course. I certainly understand the concerns of hon. Members and constituents in that area.

I shall finish on the implications of a third runway at Heathrow. It will have an impact not only on my constituents, but on 2 million Londoners because of new flight paths, noise and pollution. It will not only destroy their environment, but will undermine property prices. Evidence is coming forward of links with cancer from air pollution and of teachers' inability to teach in west London schools because of noise.

Reference has been made to air traffic control. The skies above Heathrow are dangerously crowded. We have already heard expressions of concern from the air traffic control services about the potential risk from further development at Heathrow. That is why at successive inquiries my constituents were promised, "No more." I was at the terminal 4 inquiry when we were told not to worry because if terminal 4 was allowed, there would be no terminal 5. At the terminal 5 inquiry we were told that if terminal 5 was allowed, there would be no further development. The inspector made that one of the conditions to be recommended to the Government.

The managing director of the British Airports Authority at Heathrow wrote to my constituents and me 12 months ago saying that there was no need for a third runway, that BAA opposed a third runway and demanded that the inspector at the inquiry should say no to a third runway. What happened six months later? The Government allowed terminal 5, placed a cap on Heathrow and then, within weeks, started consultation for a third runway at Heathrow. I shall raise with the Speaker the need for a correction to the *Hansard* record because the Secretary of State, when announcing the consultation on a third runway at Heathrow, said that a cap had been placed on Heathrow only for the period of terminal 5. That is not true. The terminal 5 inspector said in the context of the Government's review of future aircraft capacity that it should be assumed that no further major development would take place at Heathrow after terminal 5. The Secretary of State should return to the House and correct his earlier statement, which was inaccurate.

We no longer believe what the British Airports Authority or Governments tell us. It is not a party political matter because successive Governments have regularly betrayed my constituents. We are pleading with the Government for at least a proper and rational debate and open, transparent and independent consultation on the process. There is a rush to decision making, which gives the impression that the debate has been decided, constituencies are being stitched up and the aviation industry has a fast track to No. 10 and to Ministers that overcome any concerns of hon. Members and their constituents.

My view, which is shared by other hon. Members, is that there is a need for a rational process to look at where a new airport would provide maximum benefit. Most of us have come to the conclusion that that would be in east London. That is where my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is putting new homes, where the new work force will be and where jobs will be needed. The Government are already putting in new transport links with Crossrail and other developments.

No one believes that Cliffe is a viable option. It is a red herring. It would excite the interest of Greens throughout the planet if we asked them whether they would seek to put an airport on the largest bird sanctuary in western Europe. It is a red herring brought forward as a smokescreen by the Government at the behest of the aviation industry. The realistic option is Marinair. It may be more expensive now, but the Government may not be averse to private sector money being used to build it. I am not in favour of private finance initiatives but the Government certainly are, and the City is already interested in funding such a development.

The development would be in the Thames estuary and its environmental and social impact would be less than that of Stansted, Gatwick, Heathrow or Cliffe. It would generate jobs and, above all else, would increase public safety. Its cost would not be prohibitive because we will have to build it anyway. Let us bite the bullet and put in place a socially and environmentally acceptable new airport in the south-east to look to the long-term future of the aviation industry. The argument that it would

threaten Heathrow is fallacious because we need to develop a network of airports, each of which should develop its own speciality, to stand us in good stead for future European competition. A new airport would be part of that network.

I urge the Government to think again and, if it is necessary, extend the consultation period.

Mr. Prisk: Does the hon. Gentleman share my hope that a new airport, which he has described and I endorse, would provide an opportunity to look at competition not only among airlines, but in the ownership and management of airports?

John McDonnell: Such competition has already broken out between regional airports and airports in London and the south-east, given their competing demands for development. It will be interesting to see the role that competition plays in the development of new airport networks, which is how we should describe them.

Whatever decision the Government take, let us unanimously endorse a policy to set environmental limits on airports in advance of their development to ensure that we do not have an incremental incursion on the quality of life and environment in the communities that we represent. I welcome my constituents' coming to Parliament today and I am with them. The hon. Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) and for Uxbridge and I will deliver a letter to No.10 to ask the Prime Minister to take a personal interest because the matter dramatically affects so many people.

10.1 am

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Cliffe or any other Thames estuary airport would have a devastating impact on people not only in Kent, but in south Essex. I will not repeat my earlier comments about the lack of consultation, and say only that the Government showed monumental arrogance in not consulting the people of south Essex.

I held a public meeting in my constituency that was attended by 1,000 people. The DTLR told me that it was going to send a representative to the meeting, but it failed to do so—it did not even a send an apology. The meeting was addressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), who helped to arrange it, and soon he will hold a similar meeting in Leigh-on-Sea.

Joan Goddard, the Kent campaign leader, attended the meeting. She is a remarkable lady who has done so much to bring the matter to the public's attention where the Government have failed so miserably. Following that meeting, my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West and I organised a petition, and I shall be presenting it on the Floor of the House tonight. I hope that I will be able to present it because it contains more than 10,000 signatures—signatures are still being collected—and is therefore very large.

I congratulate *The Evening Echo*, *Yellow Advertiser* and *Island Times* on their work in publicising the matter—they have done tremendously well. When the Minister sums up, will he say whether the fifth runway shown on the maps of the proposed Cliffe airport has been withdrawn and confirm that it will not proceed now or at any time in the future? I should like an undertaking on that matter.

Cliffe airport would be a disaster for Essex and Kent. It would impose massive noise, air and light pollution, environmental damage and possible, but as yet undefined, flood risks for Canvey island and coastal areas of Kent and Essex. It would be massive overdevelopment in a region that already suffers from too much building imposed by the Government. The possible development of an outer M25 route using the A130 would be a disaster for an area that already suffers massive road congestion.

Without the efforts of local Conservative MPs and the local newspapers, the people of south Essex would not have been aware of the dangers to their environment. The proposal for Cliffe, or another Thames estuary airport, is not a red herring; it is a formal Government proposal and we must fight it as such. If we do not, and other people fight for their communities, we shall be failing our community. How will we be able to hold our heads up high if the Minister then decides to go ahead with his disastrous proposal? I have a final question for the Minister: will he come to Canvey Island personally to face the wrath of local people, or is he afraid to do so?

10.5 am

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on having secured this important debate. I am reminded of the opening paragraph of Paul Theroux' greatest travel novel. It begins:

> "It is no accident that in all the 285 major languages of the world there is not one that contains a phrase, aphorism or clause even remotely approaching 'as pretty as an airport'."

That is the basis from which we all extend. Cliffe is in my constituency. It is the most beautiful part of my constituency and I have no intention of entering into a competition of horror. I can take on the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) field for field, SSSI for SSSI and village for village. The village of All Hallows, every bit as ancient as those in west London, would disappear forever together with its church and cemetery. The feelings of the people in that area are indescribable; there has not been so great a proposed destruction of community in the interests of planning since the building of the great reservoirs in the last century. We must understand the full portent of the matter.

I question the premise on which the proposal is advanced, which is that the south-east of England requires greater airport capacity. When one reads the document, one perceives that that premise has no basis in commerce, in common sense or in human nature. It is conceivable that it is grounded in theology, which is a poor start for a planning application, particularly one of this size. The Government's argument is that the future of that great commercial enterprise, Heathrow, the mighty epicentre of work and money, which provides 2 per cent. of our national income and a vast number of jobs, will be threatened if we do not expand further into the south-east. The idea is that if we allow the beastly foreigners in Schipol, Charles de Gaulle, Frankfurt—all the usual suspects—free rein to take

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over the unassuageable bucket-seat travel market, which is growing daily and exponentially, then Heathrow will be at risk. It will become a rotting hulk at the west edge of London and will become like the London and Liverpool docks if we do not expand in another area. I well remember when that extraordinary—and false—analogy was made in the Chamber. I was sitting next to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington and I thought that he would have apoplexy.

Can the Minister tell us what evidence he has of a need to build a new hub airport, or vastly to extend Heathrow with the phenomenal and fantastic level of environmental damage that that would cause? What study can we examine that suggests that failure to do that would adversely affect the existing provision at Heathrow?

The answer is very simple. People are not containers or goods to be shipped around the world; they make their own individual and commercial decisions about where they wish to travel. People will come to the United Kingdom if we succeed in making it a lodestone, and they will continue to come. If they are unable to come to the south-east because it has reached overcapacity, perhaps they will go to Charles de Gaulle and travel to London and the south-east by Eurostar or other methods—good luck to them. However, the massive destruction of our environment and communities in the south-east on a false economic premise is an unacceptable price to pay.

As I said, I do not wish to indulge in any form of nimbyism, but I cannot be part of the debate without drawing to the attention of the Chamber the environmental, economic and communal damage that would be done to the Cliffe marshes, Cliffe and the Hoo peninsula if ever the proposal were given life and air. On that site, we have the finest SSSIs in Europe, which are completely irreplaceable. There is no mitigation for the loss of such environments. We would lose entire communities including 1,100 homes in All Hallows, an ancient village in which people can trace back their membership to the community for generations. All of that would disappear.

On the issue of consultation, we had a consultation exercise, the chosen location for which was a hotel in my constituency. It would have been impossible to find an area or a site more geographically remote from the Hoo peninsula than that hotel. It has been suggested that that was deliberate. I do not suggest that, but it was an error.

I can tell the Chamber that my constituents are a sturdy lot. In history, no constituents have given more for their country than those who have lived in the area of Chatham, its dockyards and industries. They are not shy of making sacrifices in the national interest, but they will not tolerate the destruction of their lives and their much-loved environment on the basis of a false theology.

10.13 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I echo the comments of the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews). We are all here in an effort to plead our cases, but we should not do so on the basis of not wanting to be the ones to be sacrificed for development. I feel passionate for my constituents and the area of Heathrow. The demonstration there today and the petition will show their strength of feeling, and other areas will have the same strength of feeling.

The Minister must have heard that the period allowed for consultation is a sham. The Government must immediately extend it for the sake of fair play. I shall not reiterate the statements of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) or my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson); on this matter; we are all friends in Hillingdon. The pollution and destruction is, of course, dramatic, but I shall not ask for it to be dumped in someone else's backyard.

It is obvious that nobody wants the development and, in echo of the comments of the hon. and learned Member for Medway, I should like to question whether the Government have made the case for such a dramatic increase. We should be managing demand and considering what must be done. What about making rail infrastructure more efficient to cut down the number of internal flights?

Most people would prefer to go by rail if it were efficient and cheap, rather than fly around the country. That must be looked at.

As many other Members want to speak, I shall cut my speech short. I would simply say to the Minister, and to people outside, that the time has come for us seriously to consider what we want. Do we want to put the environment and quality of life higher on the agenda? If no one wants these developments in their backyard, we must seriously consider drawing a line in the sand and looking at the alternatives, as the hon. and learned Member for Medway said. I am not going to say that the developments should be sited anywhere. I, too, feel passionately about Cliffe. As a bird watcher, I have spent many happy hours there and I shall fight for that as much as for Heathrow.

We do not want to enter a game of each trying to prove why we should not have an airport or expansion in our constituency. We all feel the same. This is an opportunity for the nation to look seriously at what it wants.

10.15 am

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on securing this important debate. I shall endeavour to be as brief as other hon. Members have been.

I endorse in particular the remarks of the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). There is nothing more undignified than saying, "Don't take me, take him." The speech that introduced the debate was balanced. I agree with some parts and disagree with others. I do not have the misfortune to represent a parliamentary constituency containing one of the sites, but mine is remarkably close to one, and villages in my constituency would be adversely affected were the Stansted proposals to go ahead.

I am a little concerned that arguments about Heathrow have been being made for years. They have been put eloquently, and Heathrow has suffered interminably. The arguments for Cliffe do not seem to

me to be arguments at all. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) said so eloquently, if we really wanted to stir up a hornet's nest, or bring down a whirlwind upon us—he put it much better than I—we would propose the most important scientific and environmental site in the country so that all opposition would rage up against us. The danger for Stansted is that the arguments against the other prospective major sites are so strong that people will start to say that Stansted is the least bad option. I shall not, therefore, go down the route of saying that we should have an airport at Cliffe or expand Heathrow, or open up the arguments about Gatwick. That would be dodging the issue.

I must make it clear that there is a strong environmental case against expansion at Stansted. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford put the arguments very well. We already face a situation in which local people cannot afford to buy local houses. I do not believe that employment expansion is needed in our part of Essex and Hertfordshire. If we had airport expansion, most of the workers would not be able to afford most of the available properties in our area.

The countryside around Stansted has attractive villages set in wooded countryside amid low rolling hills and valleys. It is not, as some would picture it, flat and interspersed with concrete, but very attractive old English countryside. It has already been threatened by speculative house builders. Each time there is an airport expansion, the developer comes jumping on the back of that, to build houses that are allegedly for the work force but that in reality will be sold to those who commute down the motorway to London to work and return in the evening.

The consequence is not only the destruction of the appearance of the countryside, but a substantial undermining of village life and rural ways. I have been told that if one strolls of an evening in certain woods close to Stansted, one smells not honeysuckle on the air, but petroleum. A vast increase on the scale that is contemplated would have a devastating economic effect on our area.

On Cliffe, I propose to say only that I strongly oppose it as an alternative site. Like the hon. Member for Uxbridge, I have been a lifelong watcher of birds and I know how important Cliffe is to anybody who is interested in nature conservation. That is evident when one hears that avocets and little egrets breed there—they were extinct as breeding birds in this land when I was a boy.

Way beyond that is the question of the effect that the proposals will have on the way in which we live our lives. We must start to challenge the figures that have been put forward, which are projections into the future based on what happened in the past, as though nothing ever changes. We were recently reminded that in the 1960s television shows attracted 28 million viewers; now they attract only half that number. As the world changes, people's tastes change. Is it really worth the price of destroying our environment and parts of our way of life just to have a cheap holiday in a country that is warmer for some parts of the year?

10.21 am

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): My constituency is getting it on both sides. Down in the south-east corner, just over the border, it is proposed that Stansted should quadruple in size to double the size of Heathrow. Small villages such as Little Hadham will come into the 57 DB footprint. That means that villagers will live in an area where the average noise level is 57 DB, so that they are unable to sit out in their gardens or to live their lives against the background of a relatively unspoilt rural area with a low ambient noise level. Further north, rural areas will live with the constant background of a low hum that does not quite reach the 57 DB footprint. The proposal means that 80,000 new workers will move into our area and that 18,000 new houses will have to be built in an area that is already the most populated county in the country. On the south-east side, there will be a 10-fold, or possibly an eight-fold, increase in traffic. It is disaster for people in that part of Hertfordshire.

On the other side of my constituency, just a few miles from the border, is Luton airport, where a five-fold increase in traffic is proposed, with a realignment of the runway that would push traffic across Letchworth and Hitchin as it turns to land. Again, there will be a low hum all the time, not just intermittently, and 2,600 extra houses and 12,000 extra workers will be needed. One has to ask whether it is sensible to build airport capacity so that arrivals and departures fly over people's homes—surely a better solution can be found. I do not like the look of the Cliffe proposals, but, as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said, we should examine options in the Thames estuary—perhaps Marinair.

What is proposed for Stansted is an outrage. Seventeen protest meetings have taken place, and I pay tribute to Norman Mead, who has been to every one. He is leading the campaign and understands the issues very well. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he lives in an area that is already badly affected by noise and pollution, and does not want it to be spread out over the whole area. I pay tribute to the *Herts and Essex Observer* for its "Stop Stansted" campaign. It has been reassuring to have the support of the local newspaper.

The Government must think again. The proposals are nothing less than disastrous for my constituents in north-east Hertfordshire and for the neighbouring areas in Essex.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I would like to remind the Chamber that it is customary for Front-Bench speeches to start at 10.30 am. I hope that everyone will respect that.

10.25 am

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): The site of the proposed Cliffe airport is not in my constituency, but right next to it in the constituency of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews). Gravesend would be directly under the flight path, and the villages of Meopham, Higham and Shorne would be directly affected.

Last night, Gravesham borough council met to consider its view on an airport at Cliffe. It invited the public to the meeting, which was attended by 200 people. As with so many of the meetings that have been held in recent weeks in my constituency, hundreds of

[Mr. Chris Pond]

people added their opposition to the thousands who have already expressed their concerns. Gravesham borough council last night resolved to oppose an airport at Cliffe. Medway council, Kent county council and every other representative body in the area have now decided to oppose the proposal.

It was perhaps surprising that the representative from the youth forum at last night's meeting stated the objection of young people in the area. One would have thought that the prospect of 50,000 to 80,000 long-term jobs would have been tantalising to young people. In fact, they believe that the environmental impact would be such that they, too, wish to oppose the airport.

Many hon. Members have said that they do not wish to engage in nimbyism or a competition as to who will suffer the greatest damage from the proposed airport. Certainly none of my constituents who have opposed proposals to site an airport at Cliffe have said that it should be put elsewhere. We all understand the devastation that it would create to our communities, and we are all determined to fight for our own communities, but to do so in such a way that we do not damage others.

Dr. Stoate: I am pleased that people in my hon. Friend's community agree with those in my community that this is a proposal too far. I do not wish to get involved in nimbyism either, because that would be wrong. However, it is important that communities work together, therefore, I reiterate that my community feels exactly the same as my hon. Friend's does, and we are working together on this very important issue.

Mr. Pond: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We are working very closely with other hon. Members in north Kent to oppose the proposal on behalf of our communities.

I want hon. Members to understand the scale of the proposal for Cliffe. We are talking about a four or five-runway airport, twice the size of Heathrow, which would operate 24 hours a day. It would cost a minimum of £11.5 billion, not counting much of the infrastructure costs. It would be built on marsh land and would have to stand on a 15 m platform to prevent its sinking into the Thames estuary. We are talking about a massive project.

As other hon. Members have made clear—I will not dwell on it because of the time—the site is of international importance because of its scientific value. That is why it is a concern for all of us. Other hon. Members have said that they too will oppose an airport at Cliffe because of the impact on the wildlife, especially bird life. The consultation document makes the point that there is also a very real safety concern. For thousands of years, the flight paths of wild birds have crossed the area, and they would not sit well with the flight paths of jet aircraft.

I shall not dwell on the issue, except to say that the Government are aware that they would be tied for many years in legal wrangling with the European Commission and organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds if they were to choose the site. A decision was made under international agreements to go ahead and set that site aside because of its scientific importance and natural value. There has already been considerable damage to the Government's environmental credibility. As far as my constituents are concerned, it will take many years to repair that damage. If we were to wrangle for many years with the European Commission over environmental issues to build the airport at Cliffe, the damage would be irreparable.

I want to dwell briefly on the economic arguments because the environmental arguments have been put very well. Cliffe and that part of north Kent are part of the Thames gateway. The Thames gateway is a thoroughfare of prosperity and employment between this country and continental Europe. Therefore, if we were to drop an airport of this size across the Thames gateway at Cliffe —let's not pretend that that is anything to do with the regeneration of north Kent or the Thames gateway—it would draw on the infrastructure investment that has already been made. If we were to drop the airport there, it would become not a gateway, but a blockade.

Paul Clark (Gillingham): On that point, does my hon. Friend agree that the case for regeneration, which has been referred to by many hon. Members in the debate, in the east of London and the Thames gateway area—jobs, affordable housing and so on—has actually been made in a balanced way through public and private work through the area investment framework, which will deliver a far more sustainable development than an airport being dropped on to it?

Mr. Pond: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I pay tribute to him for the work he has done in assisting the regeneration of that part of north Kent through the area investment framework. He will know that the matter under debate is not part of that proposal. I do not plan to dwell further on the matter, except to say that there are no economic arguments for it. It would do long-term damage to not only the prosperity of north Kent and the Thames gateway, but the nation as a whole, as well as having an environmental impact. We must consider alternatives to just meeting the projected demand. We must manage the demand and look at alternatives that will not do such damage to our economy and our environment.

10.32 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on securing this topical and controversial debate. There have been useful and interesting contributions from many hon. Members who have eloquently set out the reasons why there should be no airport development on their patch. Some have eloquently set out why that development should take place in someone else's patch. The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) expressed great concern about the consultation process. He described it as flawed, and I think that he is correct. The time scales are too short and the consultation was been leading, as I shall illustrate shortly.

Many hon. Members have argued against development of airports or runways in or near their constituencies, but with the possible exception of the

hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), no one has suggested how we could address the problem and manage the demand. Rail has a key part to play, and I will come onto that shortly. The starting point for any transport policy is that it should be sustainable. That means that the policy should reduce carbon dioxide emissions, noise pollution and congestion. How do the Government's plans measure up to those challenges? I am afraid that, so far, they do not. The approach is simply one of predict and provide, and that is not sustainable. Local communities do not think that it is sustainable.

The Government are consulting on the proposals. As I said, the consultation has been leading. That is apparent in the phraseology of some of the questions. For instance, question three states:

"Airport development can bring benefits to the local area".

That is probably true, but what sort of response would the Government have got if they had turned that question around, and said something like, "Airport development can bring disadvantages to the local area"? What would the responses have been? Question four asks:

"How important do you feel it is to consider the following environmental impacts?"

If one were to change the bias, that question would ask, "How important do you feel it is to consider the following economic benefits?" The whole consultation points to a presumption in favour of massive airport development, rather than in the other direction, as I think it should.

Where in the consultation document are the tough questions? The Government have admitted that if the aviation industry takes no measures to reduce emissions, the reductions achieved under the Kyoto protocol could be offset by 30 to 50 per cent. by 2012 due to increased aircraft emissions. Where does the document ask whether people want more CO_2 emissions from aviation, as opposed to measures to reduce them? There are no such questions. Nor does anything highlight the fact that fast rail links create three times less CO_2 than their short-haul flight equivalents.

Mr. Wilkinson: As a fellow London Member, does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the possible development location that militates most against the sensible criteria that he has set out is that of the third east-west runway at Heathrow? It would do west London and the capital as a whole the greatest environmental damage. Will the hon. Gentleman and the Liberal Democrat party say so explicitly?

Tom Brake: I am happy to respond. The inspector has made his position clear, and we support the view, which was put in very stark terms, that a third runway at Heathrow is environmentally unsustainable.

I come now to the Government options. The inspector has dismissed the proposals for Heathrow. As the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington highlighted, 4,000 homes would have to be demolished to construct the third runway. It is a pity that the consultation document does not spell that number out exactly; it simply says that a number of homes would have to be demolished. Let us include the facts and figures so that people know what they are being consulted on.

Then there is Cliffe. I think that it was Richard Everett, the chief executive of the National Air Traffic Services, who said that the £11.5 billion project was a non-starter. I also understand that the Environment Minister said at a SERAS fringe meeting at the Labour conference that Cliffe was the "joker in the pack". I am not sure whether that means that it can overrule all other options or that it can be completely dismissed; the Minister's position was unclear.

Other hon. Members have talked about the implications of the Stansted option. The airport is in an area with low unemployment and a housing shortage. If up to 80,000 jobs were created there, where would the people who were going to do them live and where would they come from? That has not been clarified.

The Heathrow and Stansted options would create yet more congestion in already crowded airspace. To what extent are the safety implications of airport and runway development being taken into account? Is it sensible to have yet more development and yet more aircraft flying over congested airspace? I have a nasty feeling—I suspect that other hon. Members do, too—that everything that the Government are doing points to the Stansted option; they are steering us inexorably towards such a solution.

Rail substitution can play a key role. We do not know whether it could resolve the problem of the massive projected increase in passenger numbers, for the simple reason that the Government have not advanced a policy of using rail substitution to tackle that increase.

I want to ask the Minister a few questions—he asked me whether I had any, and I would hate to disappoint him. First, what is the Government's target for substituting rail for short-haul flights? The Government expect 500 million passengers to be travelling by plane by 2030. By how much could the Government's target reduce that number? What percentage of domestic and international journeys does the Minister expect will be by rail rather than short-haul flight by 2030? To be more specific, what discussions has the Minister had, for example, about the potential for a fast rail link between London and Amsterdam? I met Eurostar representatives last week and they were adamant that they could create the potential for approximately 3 million passenger journeys if the link were established. Therefore, what role would it play in the Government's policy?

What percentage of trips to airports does the Minister expect will be on public transport by 2030? Congestion around airports is clearly also an important factor. If the Government had a sustainable transport policy, the Minister would be able to answer those questions.

The Minister now has the opportunity to confirm that the Government are not going down the slippery slope of predict and provide for airports and runways. Will they go for the joker in the pack option—Cliffe or Stansted—or the ace in the pack that is rail substitution? Communities throughout the country will be listening very carefully to the Minister's response.

10.41 am

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on securing this timely debate and recognise the many eloquent contributions that have been made.

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

Let me first declare an interest. For 10 years I was a Member of the European Parliament, first for Essex North East and then for Essex North and South Suffolk and I still have a property in north Essex. Also, my husband works for Delta Air Lines as a sales director and I own personal equity plans in British Airways and the British Airports Authority.

Our guiding principles were set out by the shadow Transport Secretary in Bournemouth last week. We hope to put people first. We would ensure that transport policy would play its part in improving and safeguarding the environment of our communities and our world. Safety is of critical importance and we recognise the central importance of rail in developing any long-term transport strategy. Essentially, in putting people first, the Conservatives realise that a difficult balance must be reached. Airports are businesses, major employers and contributors to the local economy. Passengers increasingly want to fly on business, for holidays and to visit family, but we must never lose sight of those who live near airports. They may not travel often themselves, but they are exposed to environmental disbenefits such as noise, traffic pollution and the general intrusion of airport activity.

I curtail my remarks and put questions to the Minister. Following the strenuous representations made in this debate today and considering the impact that the proposals contain, does he now regret that the consultation period is so short and insufficient? The consultation procedure, as eloquently explained by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and others, is seriously flawed in its brevity, lack of openness, transparency and the singular lack of publicity attached to it. The short time in which Ministers could make themselves available included a two-and-a-half-month recess.

How confident is the Minister that Government forecasts are accurate when page 19 of the summary of the consultation document states that:

"The rate of growth is predicted to decline, more so in the South East".

What guarantee can he give us that such forecasts are accurate? What studies and research can the Minister point to regarding the extent to which railways can eventually compete with airlines, especially on domestic routes and for short-fall European traffic using existing Eurostar services to Paris, Lille, Brussels and Cologne and now Avignon and Nice? It is unbelievable that the Government have not undertaken such studies because our partners in the countries in which those services operate will have done so. The information is freely available to the travelling public in those countries.

What estimate have the Government made of the potential of regional air services? Let us take Manchester airport as an example. In 1982 it was a largely domestic charter traffic airport. It is now recognised as a major international airport. The key to that development was access by public transport. Does the Minister agree that it would be better to improve public transport to existing airports such as Teesside airport and Leeds Bradford airport, as happened with Manchester airport, than to develop a wholly new airport, such as that proposed at Finningley in south Yorkshire?

Will the Government take the opportunity offered by the consultation to end a current anomaly by placing car parks closer to airports? That would reduce pollution. It has been put to me that car parks in Stockport serving Manchester airport are more than five miles away from the airport, and passengers are bussed there from the car park. They are listed in airport statistics as passengers "arriving by public transport". Will the Minister end another anomaly, referred to by several hon. Members today, whereby airport-related housing, such as that in the Uttlesford district, is anything but that, as those who work in the airport cannot afford the prices of those houses?

We recognise the need to increase airport capacity, but take a national view. The focus should not be on the south-east only. I would say that, because I represent a constituency in north Yorkshire that could be better served by having a greater choice of flights from existing airports and better public transport access to them. Could we focus on regional airports, and could we have some information from the Government on the studies that they have done into using rail as an alternative?

One conclusion is that we should think about the three Es: environment, environment, environment. That should be one of the driving factors in deciding where airport capacity should go. The Government must be seen to have an independent, transparent consultation period of sufficient length. Conservative hon. Members think that three months is a gross underestimate of how long that period should be; three months is simply too short. The consultation should satisfy the demands of those with competing interests. We must never lose sight of those who, often unwittingly, go to live near airports sites such as Stansted—one of the airport sites only developed in the early 1980s and late 1970s—and whose quality of life will be irreparably threatened by the proposals.

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): As I was eating my cornflakes at breakfast this morning, I saw the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on the BBC morning news flagging up today's debate. I congratulate local BBC television on mentioning some of the debates that take place in Westminster Hall, which are too little reported. As I listened to the contributions made in that short part of the programme, I thought it was interesting how much they reflected the debate that we have had, in that there were a wide range of views on the matter.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford on securing the debate, and on the way in which he introduced his speech by supporting his constituency.

Mr. Prisk: If, as the Minister says, there is a wide range of views, why is the consultation period so short?

Mr. Jamieson: I can deal with that now. The consultation will inevitably raise concerns. The proposals will blight certain areas. We have had a considerable amount of correspondence—quite rightly—from hon. Members who say that their constituencies now feel blighted. They say that we

should be making decisions fairly rapidly, and should be reducing the time we take to discuss the issues. We must carefully balance getting proper consultation, and allowing the Government to consider views, with the fact that if we consulted for one, two or three years, we would in effect blight people's properties for long periods. Some are telling us that we should take decisions at an early opportunity. We will take those decisions in accordance with proper consideration of the points raised during the consultation.

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): Despite what the Minister says about the length of consultation, will he accept that there has been no consultation as far as my constituents in Southend, West are concerned? To add to what the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said, will he ensure that a representative from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will attend the public meeting arranged for 1 November?

Mr. Jamieson: I take note of what the hon. Gentleman said.

To return to comments made at the start of the debate, the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford said that this was a significant statement on air travel. He said that in the past we had had to "make do and mend". I agree with him entirely, which is why the Government believe that, after almost 100 years of aviation in this country, we now need to present to the country some of the clear choices that we must make.

In this country, we have a desire to travel that would have been entirely unexpected 50 years ago. The situation is such that, last year, 50 per cent. of the population of this country travelled at least once by air. That would have been unimaginable even 20 years ago. One third of the value of the freight of the imports and exports into this country also goes by air. Some 180,000 jobs in the south-east alone depend on air travel and air transport. If we continue to increase people's desire to travel, whether internally within the country or to other parts of the world, for business or leisure, we must weigh against that the environmental concerns that hon. Members from various quarters quite properly have raised in the debate today.

We must also consider the effects of noise and pollution on environments and people, as several hon. Members mentioned today. Wherever we stand in this debate, and whatever our beliefs about where a development should take place or the importance of the environment and of noise on communities, the Government did not have the option of doing nothing. We had to place these matters before the public for proper open debate, and I assure hon. Members that we have done precisely that. I accept some of the criticisms that there may be inadequacies in our documents, but I must say that they were drawn up after long and careful consideration. We proposed what we believed were good options. We reduced them to a level that we believed was sensible so that people could make proper contributions to the debate. We had to have the debate. It is a difficult debate. There are many views, even among the 20 or 30 hon. Members in this Chamber today.

Mr. Randall: With regard to open debate, will the Minister explain why section 12.2 of the SERAS study quotes a minimum of £15,000 compensation, but the compulsory purchase and compensation document quotes a maximum of £15,000? Was that just an unfortunate mistake?

Mr. Jamieson: I will jot the hon. Gentleman a note about that if he wants me to. I cannot give an answer straight away.

With regard to the comments made today, the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford talked about the length of the consultation. I believe that I have covered that. The problems of blight would have been considerable if we had extended the debate. I must take him to task for using the phrase "planned development" at Stansted. There is no planned development, just options. It is important in our use of language that we appreciate that these are options, not proposals. On the other hand, I fully understand the important concerns of his constituents that he raised. I assure him that the Government are mindful of those considerable concerns.

Comments have been made about the consultation process, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) questioned whether it had been advertised sufficiently. I believe that it was advertised in the *Evening Standard* and *Metro*, and from the amount of interest that we received in response from people in local areas as well as wider areas around the country, it seems to have been well publicised.

John McDonnell: The interest generated in my constituency was initiated by us. It was not advertised in the local paper. The *Evening Standard* is not our local paper and *Metro* often does not reach my constituency. Our local paper is the *Gazette*, in which the consultation process was not advertised. According to the Government's figures, 35,000 of our constituents will be poisoned by nitrogen dioxide levels that go beyond European limits. There were no experts at the consultation meeting and no medical expert was present to answer questions about the effects on our physical capacity to survive.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I should be happy to discuss any deficiencies in the consultation process that he brings to my attention. This is the first time that I have heard about some of them, and if he had told me about them earlier, I could have dealt with them.

Mr. Prisk: The Minister has heard today our complaints about the consultation process and he has heard them before. The Secretary of State made the announcement on 23 July, immediately before the House went into recess, so for many weeks, we had no opportunity to debate the issue in Parliament. Surely, it is time for the Government to give us another two months, at least, to make sure that we have got it right. I am not asking for years, but surely six months overall is not too much to ask.

Mr. Jamieson: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but other hon. Members are asking us to curtail the process and end the blight on their constituencies. We have to balance the two arguments.

Mr. Prisk: Who are they?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman asked about the consultation at Stansted, which he suggested was not

[Mr. Jamieson]

properly advertised. Apparently, there was huge interest in the exhibition and the Secretary of State will respond to the request for an extra exhibition in the next few days.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington, as always, argued powerfully the case for Heathrow, but some of his arguments illustrate the difficulties. My hon. Friend has rightly argued strongly in the past for jobs and prosperity in his constituency, but he also talks about the intrusion that would be caused by further development, which I also understand. That is the nub of the problem. We must consider jobs and development while reducing the detrimental effects on local people.

Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman was not present for the whole debate, so I hope that he will forgive me if I do not give way to him.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) made several helpful points. He asked about the fifth runway at Cliffe, but it would be inappropriate at this stage for us to add any options to those proposed in the consultation document.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I will when I have answered his previous point. He said that that runway would only receive arrivals from the south-west and would not affect residents in south Essex.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) said that he had considered the proposals, field for field and ancient site for ancient site. Of course, that is part of the dilemma because there are conflicting interests in each of the various developments. He questioned whether we need the extra capacity in the south-east, precisely the question that we asked in the consultation document. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) was right to stress the importance of environmental considerations, but if we decide that there should be no more airport development, will he tell his constituents that we are restricting their ability to fly? That is the nub of the question. I think he said that he was in favour of a reduction in air travel, but if that is Liberal Democrat policy, he must answer the question whether we should reduce people's ability to fly.

Questions were asked about rail links and substitution, which are an important part of the consultation. Many of those who, like myself, represent a far-flung part of the country, would welcome better rail links, especially into London for international flights.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must now turn to the debate on corroboration in sex abuse cases.

Sex Abuse Cases

11 am

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): In 1998, I was holding one of my regular Saturday surgeries when two men came to see me to discuss their deep concerns about a friend. Their friend was a social worker in a local care home that had been established for many years and looked after young men who came from broken families or had misbehaved. For one reason or another, those young men had no one else to care for them except the council. The men's friend had been arrested for sex abuse, but they said that it was impossible that he could have committed the crimes of which he was accused.

Of course, that is a pretty normal response from anyone who learns that a friend has been accused of a horrendous crime. Sex abuse is one of those private things, and we now understand that the most vulnerable and innocent sorts of people can at one time be sex offenders. I told my visitors that they should be content with the outcome of the criminal proceedings and the jury's verdict on their friend, but I promised that I would ask some parliamentary questions about sex abuse crimes.

The answers that I received to my questions were alarming. It transpired that more than 40 police authorities had investigated cases of historical sex abuse, as opposed to one-on-one abuse, during the past two years. Police authorities receive two sorts of complaints about sex abuse—one about abuse initiated by an individual against an individual, and the other about abuse by an individual against many individuals. Those 40 police authorities were considering complex sex abuse cases involving hundreds and thousands of complainants and thousands of potential sex offenders.

Dozens of prisons hold sex offenders in this country. I have been to prisons that are exclusively the domain of sex offenders. Sex offending is a huge problem in the UK, and the associated costs of the inquiries are fantastic. When I asked a parliamentary question about Operation Rose, an inquiry by the police in the north-east, I was informed that the police costs alone for prosecuting those cases were £5 million. I estimate that £5 million must go to the Crown Prosecution Service and another £5 million on court proceedings, so each inquiry must cost about £15 million. I therefore suspect that the amount of public money allocated to the prosecution of cases is some half a billion pounds.

Armed with that sort of information, I received inquiries from other hon. Members whose constituents had come to see them. I decided that we should form an all-party group, but it was with some hesitation that I wrote to my colleagues asking for support. On the surface of it, we appeared to be a group who were generally in support of paedophiles, but that was certainly not the case.

I was very reassured when, after writing my first and only letter seeking support for the group, we received 60 responses from hon. Members on both sides of the House. The group was established one year ago. Our terms of reference were that we should not interest ourselves in individuals' guilt or innocence, but merely seek to identify and examine the processes used by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts

when prosecuting cases. We would focus not on people, but on the process—and that is what we have done ever since.

Last year we dealt with 3,000 letters and made dozens of visits, and I have been into more prisons than I care to recall. I have spoken to complainants, victims and people who have been accused of sex offences and incarcerated for 20 years. I have spoken to judges, the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General—and, indeed, the Minister who is here today.

The group has had a significant amount of correspondence from many different people, although essentially it has come from two groups. First, there are those who have been accused by another person. Secondly, there are the friends and families of the accused, or "the damned", as I prefer to call them. This group has relatives who have been accused of the most horrendous acts against not just one, but dozens of people.

I also have many letters from social workers and care workers who have been arrested and released, but who are waiting for another knock on the door. I have letters from people whom the police have identified as suspects and who are desperately waiting to discover the outcome of the deliberations, which can sometimes take as long as three or four years. I have letters from people who have been arrested and who are waiting for the police to put together their case. I have letters from those who have been charged and who are waiting for their cases to come to court. Finally, I have letters both from those who have been acquitted and from those who have been convicted.

All those people discuss their grave concerns about the processes that the police use to execute their inquiries. I think that often, the only difference between those who are acquitted and those who are convicted is luck, which consists of little more than the calibre of the team that supports them and the climate in which the case is conducted on the day.

How do people such as care workers with an unblemished service history find themselves accused of sex offences? When do they know that their world, and that of their family and friends, is about to collapse? It happens in one of two ways. Some of them may be at work. Someone who has been working in a care home for 30 years may be summoned to their supervisor's office to be told that allegations have made against them and inquiries are being made. They must go home at once and wait—which is what they do. Some of them wait a long time before finding out the nature of the complaint against them. Other people, however, may have been retired for 20 years. There may be a knock at the door at six o'clock in the morning, and six police officers may be waiting outside to tell them that they are being arrested for sexually abusing 20 people, 30 or 40 years ago.

Those who find themselves in that position have two ways out. They can admit their guilt; contrary to popular myth, many do. Many sex offenders are glad that they have been arrested, because they were locked into appalling behaviours from which they were waiting to be liberated. I have met sex offenders in prison who never want to be released in any circumstances, because they are so afraid of what will happen to them when they get out, and because they know that they are still extremely vulnerable.

Other people with whom I deal profess that they are innocent, as one would expect, and I have come to believe that there is in fact every likelihood that some of them are. They then wait to go to court.

How do the police come by the allegations that place those individuals in such a predicament? Police use a number of processes, one of which is trawling, and they receive complaints from a number of sources. What is trawling, and where do the complaints come from? Some come from solicitors who manage compensation schemes. Their advertisements say, "No win, no fee," and, "Have you been subject to a traffic accident?" or "Have you been abused? If so, you may be entitled to compensation." People who have been abused or who are seeking compensation may come forward legitimately and the solicitor refers them to the police; that is one source. A second is the individuals who go directly to the police.

There are also cases in which the police go "cold calling" and realise complaints directly. What does that mean? In certain operations the police authorities have identified every social worker who has ever worked in a care home as an individual who might have committed a sex crime. They have to start like that; they seem to believe that sex abuse is rampant in care homes. I do not share that view—it is a damning indictment of the vast majority of people who give their lives to help those who are far more vulnerable than they are.

The police may write to all the individuals who have ever lived in a certain care home asking them to help with inquiries and advising them to make contact if they suffered any problem while in that home. That may identify an individual, who will then give a statement along the lines of, "I was sexually abused"—or perhaps physically abused—"But I can't remember when."

The police then have just one statement. If they present one statement in court against a man who might have had 40 years' unblemished service, they will not win. That has something to do with the majority of complainants in such cases; they are largely convicted criminals. I have visited such people in prison, and many have themselves been convicted of murder, grievous bodily harm or other horrendous crimes, including sex abuse.

Thus the police have a statement from somebody and there is every probability that that person is a convicted criminal. They know that they cannot take the case to court—they would never secure a conviction—so they need corroboration of the evidence that they have from that one person. Therefore, they seek others. They do so by telling the first individual that it is necessary to identify others who might be able to help, and asking whether that person can think of anyone else who was present at the time. The individual might offer a list of people whom the police can then interview—usually in prison, because most of those whom they seek to interview are in prison, on remand or on parole.

The police go to prisons, frequently unannounced—I know that because I have spoken to people who have been interviewed by the police in prison—and sit down with a complainant. They say, "We've come to see you today because we hope that you can help us with our inquiries in connection with an individual who has been accused of, and arrested for, sex offences." They normally offer a photograph at this point, and say,

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"This is the man. He has done the most horrendous things to other people. Is there anything you can say to help us, because the statement that we have is not enough to convict him? We need something else. Is there anything else that you can give us?"

In a real case that came to court this year, the police had been to see an individual in prison. At the first interview, he said, "I've got nothing to tell you at all. This man has done nothing." But the police say that such people are hardened criminals, that they find it difficult to make disclosures so they have to be encouraged. So they went back to see that individual again and again and again. They went back to see him 15 times in 10 different prisons—then they got a statement. He was not the only person whom the police were seeing, because although they now had two allegations, two were still not enough, as the two people who had made them were convicted criminals, serving sentences for the most horrendous crimes. That is not enough; the police have to find others, and they do.

During the conversation the police can say, "There's compensation available; it's only right that you should receive that." Or they can say, "You know, you're coming up for parole," which may be in 20 years' time, 10 years' time, five years' time or next week. "How good will it look for your parole that you have identified the fact that you were abused as a child?" I have interviewed people, and for many of them money is not the issue. They have more to gain from helping the police than just money. They receive many visits from the police and see much activity. They become the centre of attention; they are not the baddy any more, but the goody. Some are very much persuaded by the opportunity to get a good report when it comes to parole time.

At the end of the day, the police may have 20 complainants. They need 20 to get to court because invariably, days before the case is to be heard, that 20 is whittled down, perhaps to 10. They know that statistically, they need at least eight to get a conviction. I can tell hon. Members that if anyone comes to their surgery and says that he has been accused of sex abuse, there is only one question that has to be asked, if he is a social worker: "How many complaints are there against you?" If it is eight, tell him to forget the judicial process and not to bother going to court, because he can go and see the judge and tell him that he can save the public purse a lot of money because he knows he is going down. He will go down. There is no way that eight people can be dispensed with , because the idea is that one can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. If someone is facing eight individuals accusing them of the same crime over decades—there may be 60, 80 or 100 different sex indictments—people will think that there is no smoke without fire. Someone in there must be telling the truth; they cannot all be telling lies. Therefore the person goes to court.

I attended court this summer, and on that day the newspaper that I am holding now carried the following headlines, with pictures: on page 1, "Dani, 15, killed by the uncle who lusted for her", and on page 2, "Dani's blood on stockings". Page 5 read, "Huntley's not mad, he's not depressed. He will be tried", and page 6, with a picture of bereaved parents, "We still have each other".

Then people found the accused before them and discovered a sex offender present in their midst. They had one of these people. They could not get the ones here in the paper, but they had another one in front of them. The list of indictments for him included: buggery, sometime in April 1983; indecent assault, 1984; indecent assault, 1983; buggery, 1984. There is page after page of dates: 1973, 1978, 1969. That is the kind of accusation that such people face.

In a case earlier this summer, an individual who went to court faced 10 complainants; he was summonsed with another chap on 58 counts not dissimilar to those that I have mentioned. Two of the people who were brought to court to give evidence against him were from Broadmoor and had serious psychiatric problems, so they were refused. The third person who came before the court had made a mistake in that he had applied for compensation before the court case—I wish that they had all made that mistake. He was subjected to a significant amount of cross-questioning, which eventually culminated in the defence lawyer saying, "You're doing this for the compensation, aren't you?" to which he replied, "Yes, I am." Then he said, "And everything that I've said is a complete pack of lies." Next morning he was dispensed with and was subsequently brought before the judge for perjury, for which he is awaiting trial.

On the following morning, the next person who was due to give evidence did not turn up. The judge called for them to come, and they sent a letter to the court—

Mr. Alan Hurst (in the Chair): Order. I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the law regarding sub judice matters. It may not be being breached, but I issue the warning at this stage.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Hurst.

The letter said something like, "I'm not coming to court today because all the statements I've given have been an absolute pack of lies." That situation is very commonplace. I do not want hon. Members to think that it is an exceptional case, because it is not—I could be talking about any one of the hundreds that are going on.

The judge discharged and exonerated the two men before him, saying that there was no case to answer. One man had lost everything, including family and friends. Of course, the police are law-abiding citizens who would never do anything remotely corrupt. They never have, have they? How does such a person recover his reputation? In fact, he has not been able to.

Social services have a right to instigate their own inquiries, and having been exonerated by the court, the men now find that they are the subject of an internal social services inquiry, which will last three weeks. At the end of it, they will be told either that they will be sacked from their jobs because people believe that they have committed a crime, or that they will not. They will never recover from the allegations, nor will their families and friends.

I am deeply concerned about the processes that the police are using. I do not think that they are actively engaged in some form of corruption, but like the rest of us, they feel a collective guilt for having done nothing for so many years. So many people who were locked into

the care system reported sex abuse crimes and were never listened to. Now the police feel that they can do something, and that is what drives them on to continue to pursue people even after they have been told, "No, there are no allegations; I wish to say nothing."

It cannot be right that the only evidence used to convict a man is that obtained by the police from a witness in privacy, with no independent witnesses to the interview. I have been told that complainants can talk among themselves, but that would be difficult or impossible, because most of them are in prisons in different parts of the country. It is not necessary for complainants to talk among themselves, given that the same group of police officers are going from prison to prison writing statements on their behalf. That is what creates the consistency that allows such cases to come to court—they have been corroborated by volume.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): It is a very stark claim to say that the only distinction between those who are convicted and those who are not convicted is luck. I want to be clear about what the hon. Lady is saying. Is she claiming that some or many people who are innocent are convicted, or is she making the lesser claim that some people who are innocent are nevertheless investigated and suffer as a result of the allegations? Those are two different positions, and I should like the hon. Lady to clarify which she is taking.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I have had letters from people who maintain their innocence of the crime of which they have been accused. I do not know whether they are innocent. All I can say is that the processes employed by the police in the execution of their duty, which have been compounded by the Crown Prosecution Service, lead me to believe that opportunities exist for the judiciary and the criminal justice system to abuse those processes to deliver a result. Some people who are brought to court, as many people have been this summer, are subsequently acquitted of the crimes of which they were accused, but only through the largesse of the complainants on the witness stand, whereas others being prosecuted face complainants who are absolutely adamant.

I was told by one complainant that the compensation was the quickest £50,000 he had made in his life, and some of the people whom I have interviewed in prison have said something like, "I'll have nothing when I get out of here, but at least that person will still have his family"—if he ever gets out, that is. I am currently trying to get the Criminal Cases Review Commission to take 30 cases, all of which are similar to the ones that I have outlined today. Two of those cases will now be taken posthumously, because of the age of the people involved.

I have a set view on what must be done. All conversations that take place between the police and the victims must be video recorded. The cases are far too important for the evidence not to be video recorded. I have seen the Minister several times about that, and he keeps saying no—but I say absolutely yes. I have spoken to judges about it, and they say yes. They say that video recording makes matters much easier. I want to see all those interviews, and be able to tell my constituents that there was no way that the police could have persuaded, encouraged or induced individuals to make allegations, but that they spoke of their own free will. I cannot do that at the moment.

People accused have very little recourse to appeal, because they need new evidence, for example about the incompetence of their team. There will be no new evidence for cases in which people believe there was no evidence to convict them in the first place. Such people are in the most horrendous position. I cannot give precise figures, but I suspect that about 100 people are locked up in prison for crimes of the most horrendous nature, which they did not commit. One man was given a severe beating just a couple of weeks ago; he now has a fractured cheek, a fractured nose and fractured eye sockets. He will stay in prison, because such people are not sent down for short periods. Eighteen years, when a person is 70, is a life sentence. I want interviews video recorded and, for the reasons that I have identified, the processes must be made utterly transparent. I will then feel more confident about the outcome.

The police have done something to try to minimise the abuse of processes. They introduced guidelines earlier this year, on the day that the Association of Chief Police Officers was due to give evidence in the Select Committee inquiries into the cases—but that is five years too late for the vast majority of people. The guidelines include a list of dos and don'ts, including the fact that there must be no talk of compensation. That advice is all too late for most people, and is not enforceable.

I have asked questions about who considers the processes that the police use. The answer is nobody. I asked judges whether, when cases come to court, the processes that the police use are ever discussed. They say that that is not under their jurisdiction. I asked the Home Office who reviews the processes and checks to ensure that they are not open to abuse. Is it, perhaps, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary? It is not. That provides some evidence to child protection teams, but it does not look at the processes, or question whether people are vulnerable and being abused when they are interviewed. Is it an abuse to interview someone 15 times to obtain a statement? I think it is. That must be reviewed.

We might see changes and have cases video recorded. Although such people may be considered the most disgusting people on the face of the earth, we might still think that it would be worth video recording conversations with them. That would be fine for those who are yet to be subjected to the process, but I am worried about the men who have already been through it—men such as those who went to court this summer. They could easily have gone down. The complainants could have said, "No, I'm not seeking compensation. I don't want anything out of it. I'm not getting anything out of it." I know dozens of cases of people who have gone down. It is a matter of luck, and I must try to find some way for them to get justice.

I have already referred to the man who was seeking compensation and admitted so in court, so was taken before a judge and charged with perjury. The police force which put that man in that position got off scot-free. When people complain to the police about the processes, they are told they cannot do that. While we

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cannot do that, again and again the police use processes that are open and subject to abuse—for a good cause, but with the wrong outcome.

The criminal justice system is being prejudiced by those practices. Thousands of people feel vulnerable and open to the possibility of being accused with no hope of proving their innocence, because the evidence against them was gained in dubious circumstances with no independent witnesses. That must change. I must be able to face my constituents and say that in this country we operate to the very best standards—but at the moment, I do not believe that we do.

11.31 am

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I congratulate the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on her initiative in raising the subject under discussion today and on achieving this Adjournment debate. My congratulations are reinforced by my recognition of her bravery in pursuing a subject that can do her no political good whatever, and may even puzzle some of her constituents. If anyone under investigation by the police has first call on public sympathy, it is unlikely to be those who sexually abuse others, particularly children and young persons in their care in children's homes, schools, young offender institutions and other places where there is expected to be a relationship of care, not abuse, between the adults in charge and the young persons living there.

The hon. Lady is concerned about something with which every hon. Member should be concerned: justice. There should be justice, certainly for the victims of abuse, but also, more controversially, for those who are accused by the police and victims of sexual abuse—foul crimes that naturally excite feelings of utter revulsion in right-thinking people. Justice is a concept that is widely spoken of, but from time to time we are all guilty of wanting to define it partially or tendentiously.

One of the hon. Lady's practical suggestions, which has been subject to much discussion among those who practise criminal law and sit as judges, and, I am sure, in the Home Office, is the video recording of the taking of statements in police stations. Many interviews are already voice recorded. I know about the resource implications for the Home Office, but I hope that following the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, when tape recording of statements was introduced, the Home Office, with the assistance of the Treasury, will do all that it can to introduce widespread video statement-taking in police stations, because that will lead to greater justice in all sorts of cases, not just those involving sex abuse.

During the past two years, Leicestershire constabulary has investigated a number of allegations of sexual and other abuse of young people in the care of Leicestershire county council's social services department. The investigation—not Operation Rose, but Operation Magnolia—has been made more difficult than it might have been under different circumstances because the allegations relate to events that are supposed to have taken place well over 10 years ago, and sometimes as long as 20 years ago.

In addition, following the reorganisation of local government in Leicestershire in the mid-1990s, the city of Leicester became a unitary authority with a social services department separate from that of the county council. Some employees stayed with the old county council department, while the new city council department took others on. Personnel and other records relating to individual employees of the two social services departments, and to the children and young people who had been in their care, have therefore been difficult to locate.

The allegations of criminal activity against members of staff appear to have been made by people who, although now adults in a chronological sense, are in some cases mentally unstable, possibly as a result of things done to them in their childhood. Allegations have been made by people who are abusers of their own children, by people who are in prison and by individuals who are not the most reliable witnesses of truth by virtue of their psychiatric or social problems, or because they have or may have an improper motive for making allegations against their former carers. Some of them may hope for early release from prison for helping the police with their inquiries. Some may hope for financial compensation for their mental or physical injuries, actual or imagined. Some may want revenge for the way in which they were rejected or neglected by their families or schools, or by society.

The picture is complicated, and I cannot attempt to unravel fact from fiction, not least because I am not privy to the nature or substance of the vast number of allegations that have been made and are being investigated. It is, of course, possible that some allegations made against the employees of the two social services departments are true and will lead to convictions in the Crown court. If they are true, I accept that it would be unjust for the perpetrators to go unpunished. It would not only be unjust but it would also destroy public confidence in the care home system and in the institutions that look after the mentally ill, the socially disturbed, the discarded, the abandoned and the young criminal. So far as I know—I may be wrong—no one has been charged with any offence arising out of Operation Magnolia, although two of my constituents were arrested in the summer of 2000, put in police cells, questioned and given the firm impression by the police that they were guilty of heinous crimes.

In one of those cases the crimes ranged from non-penetrative sexual misconduct with young boys to buggery. In the other case, that of a woman, the crimes ranged from criminal violence to unkind and unacceptable behaviour. Those allegations were not made clear to my constituents at the outset, but have been put to them serially and over time. They were not told who their alleged victims were and were not given sufficient detail to enable them to refute the allegations coherently. Furthermore, they were both summarily suspended by their employers, and it was only earlier this year that they were both, almost casually, informed by the police that they were not to be charged or prosecuted, and that they no longer needed to answer to police bail. There was, they were told, insufficient evidence for their cases to proceed.

Of course, by then the damage had been done. Those people had become pariahs. For more than 18 months they were unable to go to work, to explain to their friends and families why they were not going to work, to socialise and to go about their daily lives as they had in the past. They were prisoners in their own homes,

terrified that the day would soon come when they would again be summoned by the police to be interviewed, and on that occasion charged and imprisoned on remand while the investigations against them were slowly pursued. One of them became so traumatised by the experience that he became suicidal and is still under the care of a psychiatrist. The other had to receive professional counselling for the stress she has endured. Both of them have had their faith in British justice and in the police undermined if not totally destroyed. Both are incapable of offering their employers, the social services department, and their line managers the respect that they once had for the institution and for the people managing it.

My constituents feel that they have been trashed on the uncorroborated say-so of some damaged and ill-motivated people whose stories were accepted as gospel by their employers and by the police, and that their professional lives, which they had dedicated to the care of the young and the vulnerable, have been ruined. One of my constituents is in his mid-40s and sees before him a blank future without the work, the professional satisfaction and the esteem that he had expected would take him through to retirement at 60 or 65. My other constituent, a lady in her 50s, is now back at work but cannot work in the way and with the people with whom she had worked until 2000. My two constituents are like priests who have lost their faith. They are ruined people contemplating ruined lives and a future without hope. Not surprisingly, both are considering legal action against their employers for the way in which they were treated.

Those constituents provide me with stark and immediate examples of the problem highlighted by the hon. Member for Crosby. As she said, the massive growth in police trawling operations has become a danger in itself: it is different from the danger of child abuse but every bit as corrosive to our justice system as child abuse is to the public care system. Even on the limited information that I have concerning my two constituents, it is clear to me that the presumption of innocence that should have been made in their favour—both publicly as a matter of course until conviction and privately within the police and the social services department employing them—at least until evidence of probative value became available to warrant precise charges that would stand the scrutiny of the Crown Prosecution Service and independent prosecuting counsel, never existed. It was not just under threat; it never surfaced at all.

The police in the two cases appear to have been desperate to find any information with which to sustain the theory that they had convinced themselves was the right one. They set about trawling through the memories, real or reconstructed, of former residents of children's homes in Leicestershire and believed without question or corroboration the tales that they were told.

I have been very critical today of the conduct of Operation Magnolia, at least in so far as it has touched the lives of my two constituents. I have deliberately not named them. Enough people know their names and what they have been through without making their lives worse through further identification. Equally, I have not identified the officers on Operation Magnolia, although there may be some who hear or will come to hear what I say who will be able to identify them. I want to make it clear that my purpose in taking part in this debate is not to vilify the officers on Operation Magnolia—none of them are actuated by malice—although I appreciate that they may see things somewhat differently. My purpose is to try to ensure that things are done better in future. I fully appreciate that the very small team that has been operating Magnolia is under-resourced and in desperate need of co-operation from other care agencies and police authorities, and that they are working within tremendous limitations.

We need to understand why the police investigation in Leicestershire has gone as it has and why the police officers concerned in it were—properly so—desperate to get to the heart of the crimes that they believed had been revealed to them. The key to the puzzle is one word: Beck. Frank Beck was a senior employee of Leicestershire social services. He worked for the department from 1973 to 1986 as the officer in charge of several children's homes, some in my constituency and some elsewhere in the city of Leicester and the county of Leicestershire. He later worked for the London borough of Brent, and Hertfordshire county council. He was arrested in 1990 on numerous charges of gross sexual and other abuse of children in his care while working in Leicestershire. He was tried and convicted, and received five life sentences from Mr Justice Jowitt in 1991. He died in prison in May 1994.

There is no better account of the terrible case of Frank Beck than that written by Mark D'Arcy and Paul Gosling in their book, "Abuse of Trust: Frank Beck and the Leicestershire Children's Homes Scandal", published in 1998. Anyone who is interested in the subject of this debate and the issues underlying it should read it.

The Beck case was not simply another case of a sexual predator operating undetected within an otherwise healthy competent institution. Leicestershire's child care services were subverted to such an extent that Beck and his followers were able sexually to abuse young children at will. This was possible partly because of Beck's remarkable personal qualities but also because of the weakness of the managers—and, to a lesser extent, the politicians—who were supposed to be in charge of him and his co-abusers.

Beck was a dominating and manipulative man, but had he been working within a stronger, better managed organisation or in an environment where children's complaints were taken more seriously, he would have been stopped much earlier. As it is, he is now known as arguably the worst child abuser in British criminal history, with a suspected toll of 200 children abused by him. He employed a potent combination of affection, shame, humiliation and domination, which mentally paralysed many of the children in his care and even some of the young men who worked at the homes.

Beck's is a story that has scarred the collective memory of the county and city social services departments, the Leicestershire constabulary and the local political establishment. There has been a criminal trial, and an inquiry chaired by Mr Andrew Kirkwood QC, which revealed massive shortcomings in the management of the county's social services department and the conduct of several key managers. I am happy to say that all that is in the past.

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

According to Mr Allan Levy QC, the leading child law silk who chaired the pin-down case inquiry in Staffordshire, the Beck case brought together all the main elements of other child abuse cases: sex abuse, excessive physical restraint, a punishment regime that contained elements of torture, denial of civil liberties for children in care and epic managerial incompetence. All that is true, and will have been in the minds of the social services department managers and of the police dealing with Operation Magnolia.

Never again, they must have thought, will this county and this city be caught out by a child abuse scandal. I suggest that, for the best of reasons—the desire to protect children in care, and to demonstrate that Leicester had learned from the Beck case—normally reasonable men and women lost sight of an essential in their pursuit of a dragon, and cast aside the proper professional caution and need for scrutiny that ought to have governed the conduct of Operation Magnolia, certainly in the case of my two constituents, if not in every case.

I will say no more about the case, or its handling by the authorities in Leicester, save to say that two people have probably been damaged irreparably by their experiences since their arrest in 2000. Had there been a calmer, more considered assessment of the allegations against them made at the time that they were received, their lives would not have been so cruelly changed. I do not say that in cases of child abuse there can never be a prosecution or an investigation in the absence of corroboration, for that could lead to huge difficulties and evil people getting away scot-free, but in this case, common sense and justice lost sight of each other in the rush to stop a Beck mark 2. Two of my constituents were presumed to be guilty when they had a right to due process and the right to expect that the allegations against them would be speedily, although thoroughly, examined.

There are lessons to be learned from Beck, but as a result of what I now know about the cases of my two constituents, I am left to wonder if we have so far learned the right ones.

11.47 am

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I, too, express my thanks to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) for initiating the debate with considerable passion, and for all the research that she has done during her leadership of the all-party group on abuse investigations, of which I am an officer.

I am anxious that others who wish to contribute may do so. Therefore, I do not wish to rehearse the powerful case made by the hon. Lady, to which my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) has added. I would say simply that, as far as I am concerned, there is no underlying agenda. I wish to reinforce, or recover, my general respect for the criminal justice system, and the conduct of the police in undertaking inquiries.

My own interest springs simply from the experience of two constituents, both of whom were accused of practices alleged to have taken place when they had care of children in south Wales in the 1970s. In the case of one constituent, the charges were dropped. That person was not convicted, but the agreement was that one charge should be allowed to stay on the file. In the second case, the constituent was convicted and is in prison. The hon. Member for Crosby has rightly said that it is not the purpose of the all-party group, or of today's debate, to go into individual cases, and I pass no judgment, having not studied the evidence fully in any case. The individuals concerned and their families, in the examples of the released and the convicted constituents, declare their continuing innocence.

No less significantly, a local solicitor who is well known to me and highly respected, and interestingly, who does not normally practise in the defence of sex offender cases, has come to a case involving somebody whose family matters he has perhaps been dealing with. Suddenly, he became mixed-up in inquiries that they both regarded as ridiculous and inappropriate. That solicitor communicated to the hon. Member for Crosby considerable doubts as to the conduct of the case, in which the gentleman was convicted.

I emphasise again to the House that I hope that no one present holds a brief for paedophilia, or would not wish persons to be convicted of sex offences that they have committed. However, the process gives rise to concern. I am worried about the prevailing climate of a witch hunt, because it is the nature of witch hunts, from Salem onwards, to depress people's critical judgment. Such hunts allow conclusions to be reached that are prejudicial and that have, in many cases, been compounded by the great age of some allegations. I have referred to two cases known to me in the 1970s. It is the nature of those cases that there might be no forensic evidence, so they rely on individual testimony.

The hon. Member for Crosby and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough have mentioned their concern about the conditions under which that testimony may have been obtained and the inducements, whether in cash or in kind, that may be available to those who make those claims. Of course, that does not mean that evidence should not be taken seriously and dealt with by a court, but it must be handled very carefully and the circumstances in which it has been obtained are relevant to that.

To date, the incidence of cases reported is uneven across the country. The hon. Member for Crosby comes to the subject having considered a complete cluster in Merseyside. It seems extremely implausible that such activity, if it is on anything like the scale suggested by those inquiries, is not replicated across the country. Inquiries by other police forces may even the score, but the number of cases seems disturbingly different. Frankly, cases are also likely to cost some local authorities, whose employees are involved in such allegations, a fortune in compensation payments, as they have a general duty.

I am not a lawyer, as will, I think, become apparent, but I am concerned by the creeping extension of similar fact evidence. During the last century, we went a lot further than the famous brides in the bath case, which involved three strikingly similar successive examples of brides dying in the bath. From what I have seen, that extension is beginning to become prejudicial, for reasons that the hon. Member for Crosby mentioned.

I shall make a related point that does not bear on the strength of the convictions of those concerned. There are cases, which have been brought to the attention of our group, involving people convicted of sex offences who continue to deny their guilt. Many such convicted prisoners are not able to access large parts of the sex offender programme because of that, so they are likely to lose their opportunity of parole. Indeed, their sentences are increased as a result. There should be ways to handle that so as not to make it impossible for them at least to participate in activities that could be beneficial to them, and to be released at the appropriate time, given their general conduct.

From what I have seen of sex offender courses—I visited Rye Hill prison in my constituency only last week—there is a great deal of merit in them, but national moves are needed to ensure that such training programmes are available to all convicted prisoners on an equitable basis and that their outcomes are improved. There is work for the Home Office and the Prison Service to do on that subject.

May I draw on my experience of receiving such submissions when I was a Minister, although I was not at the Home Office? If I were confronted by anything like the concern uncovered by the hon. Member for Crosby and the all-party group, which has been expressed this morning, I would want to reflect on the submissions seriously, especially the safety of convictions.

We know that the case that we have been discussing is difficult, because of the widespread and perhaps proper national anger about the abuse of children. However, even if it is impossible to re-open cases or to establish separate machinery for so doing, I hope that Ministers are prepared to improve the central database that handles what has been going on and what the research of the hon. Member for Crosby has been instrumental in drawing out. The Home Office's approach to managing and monitoring the process has, frankly, got out of hand.

The matter is serious. Justice works both ways—for the victims of criminal activity and those accused of carrying it out. In this case, changes and a fairer process are urgently needed in the interests of justice.

11.56 am

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I begin by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) for securing the debate and for leading on a subject that is difficult for any politician to deal with and which will secure her no cheap votes anywhere. I do not say that the hon. Lady is totally averse to seeking cheap votes on occasion, but the contrary is true in this case.

I became aware of the problem when an individual who was under investigation came to my surgery and whose primary concern was the slowness of determination. He was convinced that he was innocent and that the process of deciding that would take a long time. I was a little uneasy. I did not know the circumstances and, to some extent, I went through the formalities, making inquiries in the appropriate places. I was somewhat discountenanced to find that more and still more people subsequently came to me with similar complaints and claims of innocence. They had been caught in some trawl. I began to take the issue more seriously in terms of its general principles.

Child abuse is a terrible, terrible crime—it destroys childhoods—but because it is such a terrible crime, to be wrongly accused of it is a terrible event for an individual. It ruins lives, just as the lives of the abused children are ruined.

In our society, there is immense concern, even panic, on the issue. The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) mentioned Salem, witchcraft and the emotions that run high when there is a moral panic throughout society. Of course, there is an important difference: witchcraft did no real harm, but child abuse does considerable harm and must be taken absolutely seriously by everyone in society. However, there is a parallel danger: the double abuse of innocent people wrongly accused and innocent people abused. That will happen whenever common sense, fairness and the ordinary rules of evidence are ignored in circumstances in which investigators have too much pressure put on them to get an immediate conviction or when they become blind to counter considerations. A recent case in Newcastle, which is not identical to the one we have been discussing, shows what can go wrong. The lives of young professionals were pole-axed by the witch-finder mentality of a particular doctor and the slackness of a social services department.

I have no sympathy whatever, in any circumstances, with paedophiles such as those who do not seek help and prefer to normalise their perversion, desensitising themselves from the vulnerability of children. Precisely because I have no sympathy with paedophilia and find it horrendous, I do not want people to be accused without good evidence, which is the point on which the debate hinges.

Good evidence is not usually obtained when there is the prospect of compensation or any encouragement of malice or revenge. It is not obtained when we ignore circumstance, plausibility or contrary indicators. I may part company with some hon. Members in the Room on this point, but I am convinced that all those issues will come out in court during the judicial process.

I may be a little innocent or a little naïve, but if that were not the case, I have sufficient faith in British justice to think that if lawyers are up to their task and if judges are what they pretend to be, that will ensure that considerations such as the one to which the hon. Member for Crosby drew our attention will be properly aired in court. However, that is different from saying that such considerations are foremost in people's minds during investigation. There is evidence that that is not always the case. In certain areas, the ratio of suspects to prosecutions, for example, is a cause for concern. Leicestershire was cited as an example. We must ask ourselves whether the process is ideal when there is a large number of suspects, but a very small number of successful prosecutions.

A serious investigation that does not lead to a conclusion involves certain deeply distressing elements. As the hon. Member for Crosby pointed out, it can involve a police raid, often early in the morning, on the home of the person suspected. It will almost certainly result in suspension from work, gossip, stigma and shame for the individual, but may not result in a conviction and may not mean guilt. I accept that the two are different.

[Dr. John Pugh]

The hon. Member for Crosby alluded to the possibility that people who are not convicted may be guilty, but acting without proper evidence or without proper conduct and examination of that evidence, and not using the rules that would apply in ordinary investigations, causes problems. There is intense suffering for the innocent person, which has been drawn out in many cases, especially in Merseyside. People who are acquitted have been cleared, but none the less they have remained under suspicion for long periods. A likely corollary of that problem is that if we conduct investigations in such a way and do not reflect on how we conduct them, we shall create a general social anxiety about all relationships with children. Society is not noticeably improved if adults fear to talk to children, or if every contact is seen as some sort of sexual advance.

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that he must conclude shortly?

Dr. Pugh: I am coming to my conclusion now.

I cannot spot the child molester, and I have been surprised and shocked by people who turned out to be one. However, I do not think that we shall get back to a more wholesome world by encouraging false accusations, suspicions or malicious claims if the rules and procedures for investigating child abuse are different from those used in other serious crime investigations conducted by the police.

12.3 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) has taken a valuable and courageous step in bringing the matter before the House. No one who listened to her arguments, or who heard the emotion in her voice, which is important in such matters, can fail to be moved by her concern that the conviction of a certain category of offender in sex abuse cases is turning into a lottery. The matter should be of grave concern to the House, because if that is happening, the quality of justice that we tend to take for granted in this country is being undermined. She raises a serious issue.

Justice is human and therefore fallible. This country has a system of justice that we hope operates well, perhaps better than those in other countries, but that does not mean that there cannot be miscarriages of justice. That is one reason why, historically, we have tended to weight the scales of justice in favour of the accused. We require the conviction of the accused only if a jury is satisfied and sure. Through our common law system, we have introduced a series of extra safeguards, designed by judicial interference, to protect the accused. However, we must face up to the painful but inevitable fact that the more safeguards there are in place, the more likely it is that, in addition to acquitting the innocent, on occasion the guilty may be acquitted.

That is one of the difficult balances to be struck, and I dare say that a reason for it is the fact that there were usually only two options available in the criminal justice system in England and Wales in the early 19th century: the accused was either acquitted or, for a serious offence, hanged. The fact that we have moved away from such a system should not make us forget that the lives of those who fall victim to the criminal justice system, and who are innocent but convicted, as well as the lives of their immediate families, are ruined. As the hon. Member for Crosby, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) so eloquently described, that ruin is something from which they may never recover.

Over the past 20 years, the trend has been all one way. It is significant that the title of this debate refers to sex abuse cases and corroboration. Prompted by legislation from a Conservative Government—this is why I say that the matter is not party political—and in response to public concern, the House got rid of certain safeguards. For example, in 1988, we got rid of the safeguard that no one should be convicted on the uncorroborated statement of a child. In 1994, we got rid of the requirement for corroboration in sex cases, as well as in respect of accomplices. That meant not that someone could not be convicted, but that a judge had specifically to warn a jury in such cases. It is worth asking why that was done. I think the reason was societal pressure arguing that guilty people were being acquitted as a result of the safeguards used by lawyers in the criminal justice system—it was all a bit of a game and that it would be better if evidence were put before juries so that they could make up their minds. That raises important issues.

We cannot get away from the fact that although sex abuse cases constitute only 1 to 2 per cent. of convictions on indictment—it has rightly been said that an atmosphere of Salem witchcraft can so easily prevail in such cases—they constitute about 30 per cent. of referrals to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, as a result of which there is growing disquiet about whether justice is being done.

We are shortly to embark on a criminal justice review—a massive piece of legislation—during which, once again, we shall be subject to exactly the same pressures, but in a widening field. For example, there will be pressure to allow previous convictions to be disclosed to juries and to allow much more hearsay evidence to be admitted in court. Such evidence is not from the person directly concerned with the case, but what they heard from someone else. Such provisions are all designed for the same laudable aim of trying to ensure that the guilty are convicted.

As the Home Secretary has said, we want the truth, but one problem that we face is that the truth is often elusive. Our justice system has, historically, tended to shy away from it and to say, "Let's concern ourselves not with the truth, but with whether we can be sure that somebody is guilty of an offence." The hon. Member for Crosby has rightly highlighted the fact that, in our concern to ensure the conviction of the guilty and their punishment for serious and horrible offences that right-thinking people believe should be investigated and punished, we are in danger of doing our society a grave disservice. We are making it much easier for the innocent to be convicted, both by the processes that we have set up and by the background pressure from the public to see something happening to prevent things that they regard as particularly horrible. That is an enormous challenge not only for the Government, but for the House.

We have to be the protectors of the innocent and we must always have regard to the consequences of legislative change. The hon. Member for Crosby has been very specific, so I hope that she will forgive me if I widen the scope of the discussion, because unless we examine the background, we shall not see the way forward. She said that it would be desirable for the taking of witness statements to be video recorded, but that poses problems. It would be desirable, but logistically, in view of the sort of areas in which it would take place, it would place great burdens on the police.

The process of taking witness statements, as I know from personal experience, can be extremely complicated and rather difficult. In the time we have, it would not be right to go into the detail. Suffice it to say that I realised as I gave a statement to the police about a burglary at my home that they were, for the perfectly legitimate reason of trying to protect my identity, distorting what I was saying while recording my statement. As I am a lawyer and I was not too concerned about my identity being disclosed, I did not want to have anything to do with that.

I mention the incident because it illustrates the sort of problem that can easily give rise to the desperately worrying situation that the hon. Member for Crosby highlighted. She has raised legitimate issues that are not popular at the moment; members of the public are not excited about them. However, they are excited by newspaper headlines over many pages that encourage them to believe that terrible situations exist that must be remedied, and the Government do their best to respond.

Consider the long-term trend in the House in terms of criminal justice legislation. We are subtly and consistently moving the goalposts and we are likely to do so again over the next 12 months, for reasons that I fully understand. However, in our desire to secure those convictions that satisfy the public, are we losing the quality of justice? That is the important issue that the hon. Member for Crosby has raised, and I am grateful to her for her courage in doing so. I hope that the Minister responds to her specific statements and that, in the coming year when we consider the many other criminal justice issues that so closely relate to these matters, he carefully bears in mind what she has said.

12.13 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I shall be brief. We all want to hear the Minister, so I shall concentrate on just two or three points. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas). We have had a moving experience this morning, and many of us will think about it for a long time.

Child protection is so important, and I came to the debate thinking of three things: a report out this week says that many improvements are needed, that agencies should work together and that there should be better guidelines for the police. Then there is the issue of the innocent who are wrongly convicted. I have a statement from a professional in the field, which fills me with horror, as

"it may be that innocent people are being convicted but we ought to be more worried about the guilty who might get away".

When we hear such statements, we must be concerned about the actions of people working in the field.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) said, reputations can be irreparably damaged. The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said that the picture is complicated. As we progress, I think that we shall find that that is a great understatement, because the issue is so complex. The Home Affairs Committee is carrying out a full investigation, and I urge the Minister to act on its recommendations. A vast amount of evidence was submitted to it, which will clearly be important.

We are talking about the present, and we need to take a holistic approach to getting child protection right and to how matters are investigated. There must be a well-publicised framework that everyone in the field accepts. In addition to carers, we should briefly mention teachers, many of whom have had their careers irreparably damaged, although very few convictions have been made. Some responsibility must rest with those who make accusations. They must be made aware of the seriousness of their claims, and we should perhaps make clear what happens when false accusations are made. It is not always easy to proceed with a private court case to clear one's name.

We have had an important debate, but we need to hear from the Minister, so I close on that point.

12.16 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) on obtaining the debate. I also congratulate the other members of the all-party group who have contributed to this serious discussion. As the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) said, the Home Affairs Committee has been considering the issue, and the Government will want to examine its conclusions carefully. I must say, however, that the widespread use of expressions such as "witch hunt" does this complex and important issue no justice. I would not like to give credence to the idea that it is being dealt with in the atmosphere of a witch hunt.

Should we attempt to investigate allegations of sex abuse that took place some time ago? It is easy to suggest that events of 10 or 20 years ago are in the distant past, but we should remember that someone who was in his early 20s when he abused children 20 years ago is in his early 40s today. I doubt whether most members of the public and, indeed, most Members of the House would say, "That's too long ago. Let's forget about it."

We are discussing allegations of appalling crimes, which have a traumatic impact on victims. That trauma can be made worse for those who finally talk about it if they have the fact of their abuse denied. I doubt whether the House would accept that events should not be investigated because they took place some time ago. It is important that we ensure that complaints of serious crimes are followed up and that victims who show bravery in coming forward are treated justly and with compassion. The police must be able fully to follow up complaints and to pursue all lines of inquiry, whether they point to or away from the suspect.

We have had two different debates, and I want to distinguish between them. My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby used a line of argument that invites us to believe that there has been a widespread and massive

[Mr. John Denham]

miscarriage of justice, involving not only police inquiries, but the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts. The hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) and the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) distinguished that position from a narrower concern about the possible consequences of a police investigation for the lives of people who are innocent, and the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) was probably taking a similar position. That is an important distinction, and I want to deal with both sides of it.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Daventry for advising me on the basis of his considerable experience as a Minister. I can assure him that I take the issues raised by the all-party group, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby in particular, very seriously. I have returned to them on several occasions, and some changes have been made as a result. Let me make it clear, however, that, as a Minister, I can act and can advise the rest of the Government to act only on the basis of facts that can be properly examined.

Many months ago, representatives of the all-party group referred to cases in which individuals were induced to give evidence by the offer of compensation. I did what I thought was the right thing for a Minister to do and asked for instances, names and cases that could be followed up. Many months later, despite a reminder, I have not been provided with an instance of a single case.

I am in a difficult position. Allegations have been made in the debate that that practice is widespread and that certain individuals have said X, but I have not been able to find an individual case as yet. We have heard allegations about the conduct of interviews.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: May I finish my point? Terence Grange, the chief constable who speaks for the Association of Chief Police Officers on the matter, has sought details of cases in which abuse of investigations could be followed up. They have not been forthcoming. It is difficult to introduce a change of Government or police policy when there are no cases to investigate. I give way to my hon. Friend, but I want to make further points on the subject.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I thank my right hon. Friend for letting me intervene. I know that he receives thousands of letters from families of people accused of the crimes that we are discussing, and from the people themselves. He is aware that many of those cases are on their way to the Court of Appeal, and he will have been advised by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and other parts of the criminal justice system that they have received a considerable correspondence on specific cases that are being conducted throughout the country.

Mr. Denham: It is the case, however, that the all-party group has not been able to identify cases for me or, despite the offers, for the chief constable who speaks on the subject for ACPO. We must look to other sources of evidence, therefore.

On the allegation involving compensation and whether people have been induced to give evidence, we may turn to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, which reports that there has been no significant increase in applications for compensation for historical abuse, so there is another problem.

We can study the cases brought before the Court of Appeal, as a widespread miscarriage of justice on the scale alleged could reasonably be expected to show up in significant cases. I am not suggesting that a large number of cases would be involved, but some would have been thrown out due to the quality of evidence or because the investigative process was shown to be flawed. At the moment at least, evidence of such a miscarriage is not, in my judgment, forthcoming from the Court of Appeal.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) referred to the Criminal Cases Review Commission. The commission's chairman has said that although the number of cases reviewed involving sexual offences is relatively high, the number involving historical abuse is negligible. The hon. Gentleman was making a point about the conduct of sexual abuse cases, but significant numbers of historical abuse cases do not appear to be reaching the CCRC.

I am not at all complacent about these matters, and no Minister in my position could lightly dismiss allegations of a widespread miscarriage of justice. However, I have spent some time in the past year studying the indicators and signs that might make one believe that such an extensive miscarriage of justice has taken place. At this point, I remain unconvinced that such a miscarriage has occurred. Of course, we must continue to consider cases that are raised and any evidence that is brought to light.

I turn to a different point, which was raised by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough and the hon. Members for Daventry and for Southport—one on which we have made progress this year. Innocent people may be caught up in such investigations, just as they may be caught up in any other sort of investigation. The damage done to an individual faced with such allegations may be marked, and the hon. and learned Gentleman made that case extremely well. Of course, justice is not served by the distraction of fraudulent or malicious claims. Indeed, the conviction of an innocent person will not help survivors of sexual abuse. We must remain vigilant for clear evidence of possible problems.

Over the past year, the Government have recognised that investigations need to take account of the damage that can be caused to the accused, who may be innocent. We made sure that that point was explicitly made in the guidance that was produced following a recommendation in the Waterhouse inquiry report and issued by the Government to all agencies involved in investigating complex child abuse cases. It builds on the guidance in "Working Together to Safeguard Children".

The issue was not explicitly addressed in previous guidance to those handling such cases, but now it has been. In parallel with that guidance, ACPO has developed and published an operational handbook for senior investigating officers based on the experiences of practitioners who have been involved in that type of police investigation. Again, the handbook directly addresses the need to take into account the position of those accused of that type of crime, who may be innocent.

Both sets of guidance have been developed from evaluated good practice. The awfully entitled but quite important inter-agency strategic management group, which consists of senior staff from the police, social services, health and local authorities, has set the policy and the terms of reference, and has created the protocols for that type of inter-agency working. One change from the position of a year or so ago is that we have two sets of guidance that are intended to provide a strategic policy framework and good practice guidelines within which the police, together with other agencies, should operate to deal fully, thoroughly and fairly with an initial complaint and the alleged perpetrators.

I hope that hon. Members who have raised concerns today about the position of the innocent accused feel that we have responded to some of them. It is also worth pointing out that, despite the lack of substantiated cases of abuse of the compensation mechanism, the guidance also puts beyond doubt how compensation issues should or should not be addressed in the interview process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby, the hon. and learned Member for Harborough and the hon. Member for Beaconsfield all raised the question of recording interviews and statements. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 allows for the video recording of interviews in police stations. Video recording is being piloted in five police force areas, and over the summer we made additional funds, which will enable an extension of those experiments, available for forces to bid for, but it will be some time before all police stations are covered. That, however, is different from recording interviews that take place outside police stations, which would cover millions of conversations that occur between the police and the public in the investigation of many different types of crime.

We have had to consider the issue, on which we are not yet persuaded, of whether an exception should be made on recording interviews, no matter where they take place, in historical sex abuse cases while not applying the same criteria to all other types of police investigation. Aside from the question of resources, I am not convinced that the case has been made for distinguishing between historical sex abuse investigations and other investigations that the police have to undertake.

The debate is enormously important. We have all remarked that the Home Affairs Committee will reach its own conclusions, which the Government are bound properly to consider at the appropriate time. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the debate, and to give our commitment to ensuring that we can protect children and my commitment to ensuring that the justice system works properly.

Army Ranges (Essex)

12.30 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): On a point of order, Mr. Beard. I should appreciate your guidance on whether it is in accordance with the customs and practices of the House of Commons for the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) to raise a debate on the testing and demolition of ordnance at Shoeburyness and on Foulness island, both of which are entirely in my constituency, without having notified me in any way. I wrote to him on 14 October to express my concern about that.

In a similar situation on 27 March 1995, Madam Speaker gave clear and specific guidance—first, that she deprecated any such practice and, secondly, that it was contrary to the customs and practice of the House of Commons. In view of the importance of the ranges to my constituency and to the nation's security, Mr. Beard, I would appreciate your views.

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. Madam Speaker's ruling on 27 March 1995 applies to such circumstances. It states:

> "The hon. Gentleman is quite correct. When an hon. Member wishes to raise, especially in an Adjournment debate, the question of some development or project that concerns another Member's constituency, not only is it a matter of courtesy to let the other hon. Member know but it is a matter of good custom and practice. I deprecate the fact that the right hon. Member . . . has not been informed that that Adjournment debate is to take place".—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 696.]

I endorse those sentiments, but they refer to good custom and practice and do not invalidate the debate.

12.31 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise a matter of considerable concern to my constituents and those of other hon. Members. I had not intended to comment on the background to the debate, Mr. Beard, but in the light of your comments I should make it absolutely plain for the record. I and several other Members of Parliament, properly representing their constituents, have expressed concerns over these issues for a long time, and a number of us have sought to secure an hour and half's debate in this Chamber. At the end of the last Session, frustrated at having failed to secure a longer debate, I applied for a half-hour debate, and learned only last Friday that I had been successful. I understand—although I have not had the opportunity to check—that my office notified not only the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), but all the other Members concerned.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Absolute rubbish. Totally untrue.

Mr. Gale: My understanding is that my office notified not only the hon. Gentleman but all the other Members, in writing, that the debate was to take place. I told the hon. Gentleman—and he accepted it before he raised his point of order with you, Mr. Beard—that I would check that. Only this morning, I received his letter dated 14 October. I replied immediately, and that reply is on the board. In my letter, I said that I understood that he had been notified and that if he had not been I offered my

[Mr. Gale]

apology. Because he requested time to intervene in the debate, I pointed out to him that several colleagues who knew that it was taking place, having been clearly notified, had expressed a wish to intervene. I have said that I am perfectly happy for any hon. Member with a constituency interest in the subject to intervene in so far as time permits. Moreover, I spoke to the Minister when he entered the Chamber this morning—the first opportunity that I had had—to verify with him that as far as I was concerned, and as long as it was in order with you, Mr. Beard, it would be in order for the hon. Gentleman to speak briefly when I had concluded my remarks. I cannot be fairer than that, and I am sorry that we have wasted three minutes on the matter.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to raise an issue that is of considerable concern to many of my constituents living along the north-east Kent coast between Herne Bay and North Foreland—that is, the testing of ordnance and demolition of time-expired munitions on behalf of the Ministry of Defence at Shoeburyness and Foulness island and on Maplin sands in the Thames estuary—which is the source of most of the problem, and which I believe is not technically in any Member of Parliament's constituency.

I am aware that this is a subject of interest for my hon. Friends the Members for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), and that they have made representations on behalf of their constituents. Constituents represented by the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) have also expressed concerns, as have several local authorities, including Tendring, Colchester, Maldon, Thanet and Canterbury district and city councils. Tendring and Canterbury have passed formal resolutions to

"seek relief for coastal residents and their properties from the noise and vibrations caused by the MoD use of their establishment at Shoeburyness".

They call for

"the immediate cessation of destructive explosions at this establishment and the examination by the MoD, as a matter of urgency, of an alternative site in a remote area of the country where the test and evaluation functions of the MoD can be undertaken without the severe disturbance currently imposed upon the population bordering the Thames Estuary".

Those are their words, not mine. The parish councils of Herne in Kent and St. Osyth in Essex have expressed similar sentiments.

Shoeburyness is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East, and it is only right for me to say immediately that he has not endorsed the views that I shall express. I wrote those words before this morning's intervention, and I stand by them. I mean him no discourtesy in saying that it is the constituencies that bear the force of the shock waves emanating from Shoeburyness, rather than the site from which they are generated, that give rise to this brief debate. It is a peculiar fact that it is the areas to either side of the Thames estuary, along which the sound waves and shock waves rebound and reverberate, that suffer now, and have for many years.

The Ministry of Defence owns the site at Shoeburyness and QinetiQ—formerly the Defence Evaluation and Research Establishment—now operates part of it under licence. As the Minister said in a response to my constituent Mr. Woollett of Beltinge, Herne Bay, in a letter of 21 August, Shoeburyness has been operating for about 150 years. The Minister will forgive me, however, if I say that his assertion in the same letter, referring to a lack of

"conclusive evidence that Qinetiq's activities are the cause of damage to people's properties"

was less accurate. I could take up the whole of my remaining time with a litany of reported cases of cracked walls, fallen ceilings, rattling windows, shattered conservatories, broken ornaments and eventual compensation paid to claimants against the MOD—presumably not for no good reason.

It is really since the late 1980s that the size of ordnance tested and volume of munitions disposed of on the mud flats of Foulness island have escalated to the point at which they have become intolerable for residents along the Thames estuary.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): In endorsing the time scale that my hon. Friend has just mentioned, I suggest that it is surely no accident that that was precisely the time at which the disposal of old explosives was moved to the site. While many of us recognise the vital testing work done at the site, we nevertheless ask why the destruction of old explosives cannot be carried out somewhere else.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall come to that point in due course.

I have before me a letter written by my noble Friend the Earl of Arran, dated 19 March 1990, in response to letters sent by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East on 15 January 1989, 9 January 1990 and 16 January 1990. Those letters referred to

"concern expressed by constituents at the level of noise emanating from the Yantlet (on the Isle of Grain) and Shoeburyness ranges".

Lord Arran wrote:

"It seems likely that Shoeburyness was the originator in this case".

He added:

"The MOD and Service personnel using the ranges are well aware of the sensitivity of their situation and I am satisfied that they are doing all that they reasonably can to minimize the effect of their activities".

My representations on behalf of my constituents living in Herne Bay, Birchington, Westgate on Sea and Margate have led me to visit Shoeburyness on several occasions, once as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the MOD in the company of the Minister's predecessor, the noble Lord, Viscount Cranborne, and on other occasions with parties of constituents. I have been out on the mud flats to watch controlled explosions, I have been given assurances of new incinerators that would smoke out and burn explosives, obviating the need for detonation and I have seen trials using water beds to deaden the sound of shock waves—all to no practical avail.

In 1995, my parliamentary colleague Roger Freeman, now Lord Freeman, then the Minister for Defence Procurement, wrote to me stating that

"since the particular difficulties of the first few months of 1994 the establishment has taken a number of steps to reduce the effects of its activities . . . for example large quantities of sand are used to

tamp detonations. This has proved particularly useful in reducing noise and vibration associated with the disposal of unsafe or unwanted munitions".

However, with his customary honesty he then let the cat out of the bag, saying:

"There is no doubt that there has been an increase in activity at Shoeburyness which has been caused by an increase in the demilitarisation work as we can no longer dump ammunition at sea and as a result of transferring trials work to Shoeburyness which was formerly carried out at the Inchterf Range near Glasgow."

In all my dealings with Shoeburyness, Sir John Chisholm, chief executive of DERA and subsequently of QinetiQ, his staff at Shoeburyness—in particular, Peter Honey and John Denyer—and most Ministers, including the present one, have been the soul of courtesy.

However, the problem has become worse and worse. In January 2000, the *Herne Bay Times* reported:

"Windows cracked and animals ran in terror when Herne Bay was rocked by a massive explosion at the military testing site at Shoeburyness. The blast on Thursday afternoon was so severe that shockwaves cracked windows at Beltinge Post Office and the nearby village barber shop."

A local chartered civil engineer commented:

"The vibrations coming from Shoeburyness are a problem. Last Thursday's explosion was louder than usual and our office certainly shook. Already people have problems with plaster coming off their walls and if this continues it could get much worse. Older buildings aren't designed to take vibrations like that."

On that occasion, the DERA spokesman said:

"Due to the nature of defence trials it is difficult to guarantee that there will never be large explosions. However, it is important to note that Thursday's was uncharacteristic."

So uncharacteristic that on 1 March 2001 the *Herne Bay Gazette* reported:

"A terminally ill woman suffered distress and anxiety this week after being woken by early morning blasts from the Shoeburyness testing ranges."

Understandably, Ralph Mitchell vented his anger on behalf of his late wife, describing the complaints phone line as

"as much use as a chocolate fireguard".

Throughout that period, my hon. Friends and I pressed the case with the then Minister of State, Baroness Symons. We were again told that part of the problem stemmed from the MOD's Yantlett establishment on the Isle of Grain. The MOD personnel at Yantlett vehemently denied that suggestion. The MOD commissioned a firm, Vibrock, to carry out a monitoring exercise. Unsurprisingly, after months of delay and, no doubt, much expense, the consultants concluded that the vibrations and shock waves experienced by so many of our constituents did not exist.

An attempt to offer early warning of explosions through local media led to headlines such as "Get your earplugs out for tomorrow", "Gunfire Warning", "More Gun and Blast Testing" and "Explosive Weekend", and prompted Baroness Symons to write to me saying:

"I do not believe that this media coverage is helpful to the efforts we are all making to investigate the noise and vibration caused by the DERA site and I have therefore agreed that DERA can revert to the previous arrangements whereby the media are notified only in the case of unusual events."

Notwithstanding the unwelcome publicity, the then Minister, in another letter, said:

"There remains no demonstrated correlation between the activities at Shoeburyness that might be expected to result in more complaints and actual number of complaints received."

I am not entirely certain how many complaints she felt were necessary to demonstrate a link between cause and effect, but correspondence and signatures on a petition now run into hundreds on my own files alone. In that context, I should thank my constituent Tony Wilkinson and his friends for the many hours that they have spent helping me to ensure that those living in Whitstable, Tankerton, Chestfield, Herne Bay, Minnis Bay, Birchington, Westgate on Sea, Westbrook, Margate and Cliftonville have been kept informed of ministerial observations.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Like my hon. Friend, literally hundreds of constituents have approached me about the disturbance caused to them by the activities at Shoeburyness. According to figures that I obtained from the Minister, the number of official complaints received is running at just below 1,000 each year. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is only a small fraction of the actual number of complaints? I have often had reports of people who have been unable to get through on the complaints telephone number—and it is not very widely publicised. Furthermore, 10 times that number will not be aware that there is an official line on which they can register a complaint.

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We know from general parliamentary experience that most people do not complain. However, walk down the high street in any of the towns along the north Kent coast that I have mentioned—I am sure that the same is true in Essex—and people will ask, "Did you hear the bang?" My own home is nine miles inland from the coast. On a good day—or a bad day, depending on how one cares to think about it—we can hear the explosions, and they shake our house.

So what can be done? My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex is the shadow Secretary of State for Defence; my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford is on the board of visitors of the military corrective training centre at Colchester; my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury has had a distinguished career with the Territorial Army and I am a postgraduate of the Parliament and armed forces scheme. I have also served as parliamentary private secretary to two Ministers of State for the Armed Forces. I hope that we may claim that, collectively, we are reasonably well informed.

We recognise that at all times and never more than at present our armed forces need the best support and facilities available, that ordnance must be tested and that munitions must sometimes be disposed of. However, we are not satisfied that the densely populated Thames estuary is the best or most suitable site for the location of what is clearly a necessary facility. Having discussed the matter some months ago with the Minister, who received me most courteously, I am not even sure that he believes that Shoeburyness is any longer the right location.

[Mr. Gale]

It is claimed that Shoeburyness is in some way unique. Sir John Chisholm in a letter to me dated 5 December 2001 stated:

"The facilities at Shoeburyness are regarded by the Ministry of Defence as being unique, partly because of the size of the danger area and partly because of the facility that the shallow water offers for what we call 'over water recovery'. This involves firing munitions when the tide is in and then recovering them, in an undamaged state, when the tide goes out".

That is nonsense. It is a myth that must be laid to rest. Are we seriously saying that teams of military beachcombers armed with metal detectors paddle around in the mud of the Thames estuary picking up shells that are probably already deep in silt? I shall not embarrass the Minister by asking him to tell us how many shells have been recovered during each of the past five years because both he and I know that the answer could probably be provided without greatly taxing the fingers of both hands.

Next, let us touch upon security. This is a sensitive subject, but it is no great secret that, given the much-vaunted shallow water referred to by Sir John Chisholm, explosives for disposal arrive not by sea but by rail. Those trains, inevitably, must travel through densely populated areas of east London. I do not want unduly to alarm the good souls living along that line, but we live in uncertain times. Should a terrorist get his hands on the right wagons, I have a feeling that the earth might move more than a little in one or two of those towns. Surely, we should seek a remote coastal site where the necessary explosives can arrive by sea and be guarded immediately in secure berths.

Then there is the question of cost, which I have always believed is the sticking point. Until now, the thought has been that we have a location at Shoeburyness which, although by no means ideally suited to the military needs of the 21st century, is at least there. The acquisition of an alternative, assuming that the MOD does not already own one, and the equipping of it with the necessary storage bunkers, firing ranges and incinerators, and perhaps with dedicated port facilities, might cost millions of pounds that the Chancellor is not persuaded should be spent. He might think differently if an Essex town were flattened by an exploding train, but, that aside, a parliamentary answer from the Minister stated:

"Since the DERA PPP was announced in . . . 1998 as part of the Strategic Defence Review, the Ministry of Defence has spent some £7.2 million on advice from consultants and other fees."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 577W.]

I hope that the Minister will not consider me frivolous or unduly mischievous if I suggest that if the Chancellor can find that sort of money to pay consultants, finding a few million more to secure a state-of-the-art munitions testing and demolition facility for our armed forces might not prove too difficult.

We have a real and unacceptable problem and I believe that the Minister accepts that. We have a military need that must certainly be provided for and we all accept that. We have an opportunity. The Government have embarked on a review of all their defence estates to determine value for money and to establish whether there are ranges and sites that could be better used militarily or returned to public use for development or recreation.

On behalf of my colleagues and our constituents, I ask the Minister simply to give an undertaking. Will he take the window of opportunity afforded by the review to consider an alternative location that will allow QinetiQ, owned by the Government, the Carlyle group or whichever preferred bidder finally takes on the job, to provide for the vital needs of our armed forces while at the same time removing from both banks of the Thames estuary an unacceptable environmental intrusion that has persisted for far too long?

12.49 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) has left 1¼ minutes for the Minister and Back Benchers to express their opinions on the subject.

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): Does the hon. Gentleman have permission to intervene?

Mr. Gale: I said in my opening remarks that I was perfectly happy for the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) to intervene, and the Minister has conceded that as well.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I hope that the Minister will appeal to my hon. Friend to disengage from what I regard as an irresponsible, irrational and damaging campaign. Of course we know that there is noise from Shoeburyness—I live a mile from there myself. Of course I know that my house shakes. I know that we undertake dangerous work there, but let us get across some of the facts.

First, how valid are all the complaints that we hear from the hon. Gentleman? The Government have spent a lot of money on two surveys, as he well knows, and there is a third survey about to come because of all the complaints. What did the surveys, which were by independent people, actually find? They found that some 80 per cent. of the complaints received about noise and vibration, were not related to Shoeburyness in any way. Only one in five of them was related to Shoeburyness. It seems that some were associated with explosions at the Ministry of Defence range at north Yantlet in north Kent, and others were from sources that could not be identified.

Secondly, what about the number of complaints? Are people marching in the street? There are about 2.5 million people in the area. A tiny number, about 10 people, have sent in 256 complaints. The total is less than 1,000. As regards the volume of noise, we should bear in mind that the monitored levels give readings for Shoebury of about 1.5 mm per second or less, and a maximum of 1.7 mm. By comparison, a quarry is allowed 12 mm. Although I appreciate the real complaint, of which I am well aware, the idea that it is something extraordinary is ridiculous. The plain fact is that most of the complaints have nothing to do with Shoeburyness at all.

Shoeburyness is a desperately important facility. It is one of the world's leading test stations that serves the MOD and other allied defence organisations in vital testing and security. It is also used for the decommissioning of dangerous explosives, which otherwise could kill or maim civilians. It is the custodian of 8,000 acres of beautiful land, and manages its site of scientific interest standards at the highest level. It also

contributes to the local economy, with 380 people working there. The unique facility has shallow water that allows us to fire munitions into the water when the tide is in, and to recover them when the tide is out. We cannot run away from that, and I hope that the Minister will confirm it. It allows us to test the strength of the design of the munitions and ensures that they will be safe and effective for our armed forces.

The environmental test centre is also based there, in which live munitions are environmentally tested and safely disposed of. All munitions have to undergo environmental testing before they can be accepted into service. Because of the huge area, the range offers the opportunity for the Army to carry out explosive ordnance demolition training, and that helps to prepare the forces for dealing with unexploded bombs. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that it is irrelevant, we should remember that one vital task carried out in Shoebury related to work on the Rolls-Royce Olympus engines following the tragic Paris airport crash of Concorde. Shoebury was involved in the testing of those engines, and the aircraft are now flying again.

I am well aware that we often get complaints from constituents about many things. I am aware of the complaints about the noise from Shoebury, because I live about a mile away, and I know what the position is. The situation honestly reminds me of those who call me on my mobile and say, "Will you do something about these telecom masts, Mr. Taylor? It's an outrage." We have to face up to our responsibilities. Shoebury provides unique facilities, and many tests have taken place.

I am sure that the Minister will announce today that there will be another test, but does he accept the fact that the tests already carried out by independent people showed that most of the complaints were a load of codswallop and had nothing to do with Shoeburyness at all? It is very disappointing that we should have such irresponsible action on a matter of importance and national security. The hon. Gentleman is well aware of the complaints I made to him about comments in the local press about what happened in Foulness. It was appalling—

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman of the need to leave time for the Minister to respond?

Sir Teddy Taylor: I shall, therefore, sit down and allow the Minister to respond. I hope that he will say what I have said: the complaints are ones that we should not take as seriously as presented.

12.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I shall do my best to reply to the points raised in the relatively limited time left to me. I recognise that this is an important issue for hon. Members' constituents, however difficult it may be objectively to fit them into what takes place at Shoeburyness. I recognise that were I to set out to build a new test and evaluation range, I probably would not build it at the mouth of the Thames. However, we have been using that range for 150 years, and there are several reasons why QinetiQ and the MOD feel that they have no option but to carry on using it.

Shoeburyness is one of the world's leading test sites and delivers services that make a vital contribution to national security. We are all agreed that our armed forces must have safe, effective and reliable weapons and equipment to do their job. The comprehensive testing regime to which all munitions entering, or already in, UK service are subjected is designed to ensure that they are as safe as possible. Some of that testing, particularly on the larger calibre weapons, can be done only at Shoeburyness because it is the only site in the UK that is big enough to conduct those activities.

The primary role of Shoeburyness is the testing and demolition of ordnance and explosives. Testing comprises accident simulation and environmental attacks on weapons to assess their safety and suitability for services, and proof firing of munitions to prove by sampling that they meet the specification that we require. Trials work is undertaken to determine weapon effects on structures and equipment and equipment vulnerability to various weapons. The weapons tested may be manufactured for UK or other NATO services. Shoeburyness also undertakes work to ensure that protection of national assets remains viable against attack by an aggressor using ever more sophisticated weapons. Occasionally, testing is conducted on the types of weapons that potential aggressors or terrorist organisations might use.

Disposal by detonation is undertaken on obsolete items if it is unsafe or otherwise inappropriate to break them down for disposal in any other way. I have no doubt that hon. Members have seen the kilns that we use for that. We try to conduct that part of our work with little noise pollution.

I shall now address the cost of the activity in Shoeburyness in environmental terms, in particular noise and vibration. QinetiQ is not exempt from noise legislation as some local residents believe, nor is it flouting the law with the scale or the number of detonations. Health and safety legislation sets a maximum acceptable level of noise pollution at 130 decibels, weighted for the audible range of the human ear. The decibel scale is logarithmic, which, as hon. Members know, means that roughly every increase of 3 decibels is a doubling in power. QinetiQ has a self-imposed noise limit of 125 decibels at the range boundary, which is well within the law.

The noise level limit is managed through the use of meteorologically based computer prediction equipment and through six monitors that provide real-time measurements from selected sites in north Kent and Essex. There is also a single monitor on site. If predictions show that activity is likely to exceed the limit, it is prevented from going ahead. However, a few safety tests are undertaken during the year that are lengthy and once started cannot safely be stopped. If unpredicted changes occur to the weather conditions, thus affecting noise propagation through the atmosphere, the resulting impact on local communities may marginally exceed the limit. Similarly, there have been a very few occasions on which, for national security reasons, a trial has been undertaken regardless of the QinetiQ imposed noise limit.

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

During the past year, some 35,000 individual explosive and gunfire events have taken place at Shoeburyness. The total number of complaints of noise nuisance and alleged damage to property during the most recently measured 12-month period was 919. Of those, 326 were from Essex, 103 were from the immediate vicinity of the site and 484 were from north Kent. Of the 919 complaints, 253 came from 10 individuals. It being reasonable that a single significant event is liable to generate several complaints, it is a fact that well over 97 per cent. of Shoeburyness demolition and explosive test activities generate no complaints at all. Furthermore, during one study period, there were regular recordings of complaints that related to sound and vibration levels at times when the site was either shut down for the weekend or closed for the evening. That may be difficult for hon. Members to accept, but it is true.

The MOD recognises that there can be implications from trials activities and the facilities management contract, placed upon QinetiQ as the site operator, expects it to manage activities in a manner that reduces the impact of generated noise. QinetiQ conducts its detonation activities within the statutory and site imposed limits and there has been no significant increase in either scale or frequency of such detonations during the past few months. The site manager has arranged for residents to visit, which has proved popular and useful. Many visitors have consequently declared a better understanding of what is going on.

Independent reports are being conducted to determine whether there is any correlation between the site's activities and the ground shock being experienced by residents in Essex and Kent. There is no clearly demonstrable link, but a more comprehensive study will be carried out to try to prove conclusively what effects our activities have.

In conclusion, I recognise people's concerns. I say in mitigation that Shoeburyness performs a valuable function, and, where we can, we try to move the noisiest activities to areas where they will cause residents fewer problems.

Kevan Sloan

1 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): On 15 May 2001, my constituent, Kevan Sloan, was in Tenerife, visiting his mother who works and lives there. He was arrested and charged with involvement in five robberies. Subsequently, he was acquitted of three of the charges and the prosecution dropped a fourth altogether.

Several of the allegations made against Kevan were, frankly, ridiculous. Indeed, well before the trial, he was able to demonstrate conclusively that he was not even on the island on some of the relevant dates. I shall comment on the evidence shortly, but first I want to make some general observations.

Kevan is a 26-year-old man from Kirkby in my constituency. He has no previous criminal record and has been in continuous employment at a local builders' merchant since leaving school. Indeed, his employers have been very supportive of him throughout and were able to provide firm evidence that he was at work in the United Kingdom on the dates of some of the alleged incidents. All of that indicates that he was a man of good character and standing.

It is astonishing that a young man of previous good character should suddenly turn into a one-man crime wave. People who rob supermarkets are generally hard-nosed criminals. It is highly improbable that, having never been in any trouble with the police, Kevan should arrive in Tenerife as a fully formed criminal. However, the impression given by the authorities at his trial was precisely that. I have pondered why that might be. The Fair Trials Abroad Trust, a British-based human rights charity that helps EU citizens who face miscarriages of justice abroad, has taken a close interest in Kevan's case. It has described the trial judge's conduct during the hearing as "questionable" and "xenophobic".

If that was the case, we must ask whether it resulted from a lapse of objectivity or a character flaw on the part of the trial judge, or whether there is some other explanation. It is a difficult call to make, especially as I was not present at the trial to witness the judge's behaviour at first hand. However, a parliamentary answer to me on 2 July 2001 from the former Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), threw some light on the issue. It explained that, in Tenerife, there are some 4,000 cases a year in which people seek consular assistance. That figure is far higher than the figures for some other popular foreign holiday destinations, such as Ibiza, where there are 2,000 such cases, Corfu, where there are 450 cases, and Benidorm, Majorca and Malaga, which, between them, produce some 550 cases a year.

That might provide a clue to why Kevan was dealt with so severely when the evidence for his conviction was, as I shall demonstrate, so unreliable. Even allowing for the fact that not all requests for consular assistance in Tenerife come from UK tourists in trouble with the police, many do. Given the obvious problems of lawlessness from UK tourists in Tenerife, it seems likely that Kevan was made a scapegoat for crimes committed by others. As judges in this country often put it, he was made an example of for others who might transgress in the future. Had he been guilty, that would not have been

so unreasonable. However, to make an example of an innocent man is an unforgivable corruption of the basic principles of justice. I am not usually considered to be a bleeding heart liberal in relation to law and order issues; indeed, I suspect that many of my colleagues see me as even more hard line than my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. However, I am convinced that there has been a miscarriage of justice in the case of Kevan. I base that conclusion on the evidence as well as on the unacceptable conduct of the trial judge and of the appeal judges who heard the two subsequent hearings.

Kevan was convicted of robbing the La Familia supermarket opposite his mother's flat, which he used occasionally as a customer, on 15 May 2001. The only witness to the robbery was the woman serving in the shop at the time. Initially, she stated that she was not sure whether she would be able to recognise the perpetrator again. Three days later, she made a positive identification of the alleged robber from CCTV pictures. The pictures related to other incidents that did not go to trial and do not resemble Kevan at all. However, the witness then changed her mind again and, having previously been shown photographs of Kevan, picked him out in an identity parade. None of the others in the parade bore any resemblance to Kevan. That is hardly the behaviour of a reliable witness, nor is it the proper use of identity parades. It bears all the hallmarks of somebody manipulated into choosing one person, irrespective of guilt or innocence. Given that Kevan was staying across the road from the supermarket and was an occasional customer, it is highly likely that the person serving in the shop might recognise him, albeit in a different context to the robbery.

The witness gave evidence that the robber spoke in colloquial Spanish. Kevan does not speak Spanish at all, and even if he had some knowledge of the language, it is most unlikely that he would speak it with a colloquial accent. I have spoken to some colleagues with a knowledge of linguistics and of the languages concerned and they tell me that it would be inconceivable for somebody with a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish to speak it with a colloquial accent. It is obvious; consider the English of people who visit this country and speak with a foreign accent—it is not at all colloquial. Despite the fact that six reliable witnesses had stated at the pre-trial hearing that Kevan could not speak Spanish, and that the judge at the original trial acknowledged that no evidence had been produced that he could speak it, the judges at the appeal in 2002 concluded that he could have conducted the robbery in that language. Fair Trials Abroad believes that the judges at the appeal might have misread one of the defence witness statements referring to her own limited proficiency in Spanish as meaning that Kevan could speak it.

At the appeal, Kevan's defence produced five witnesses who provided the substantial alibi that, at the time of the robbery, he was with them in a bar some 270 m from the supermarket. Moreover, they gave evidence that the bar had only one door, so Kevan could not have left or returned without their having seen him do so. Finally, the robbery of which he was convicted, according to Fair Trials Abroad, bore a remarkable resemblance to the other four robberies with which Kevan was originally charged. As it put it:

"The judges made no comment on the fact that there was a clear series of robberies with the same pattern in all five cases."

Since Kevan was not even on the island when most of them occurred, it seems highly likely that all five were committed by the same person but that it was not Kevan.

Following the initial trial and an appeal, both of which were questionable and which produced unsafe verdicts, Kevan has served slightly more than 17 months of a three-and-a-half-year sentence for a crime that he did not commit. The appeal to the constitutional court in Madrid is pending.

In the past few weeks, Kevan has been moved to a part of the prison that holds prisoners on long sentences and he must share a cell with a non-English-speaking inmate. He has lost the support that he previously had from the network of English-speaking inmates. He is determined not to learn Spanish, because he believes that he does not belong in a Spanish jail and that doing so could compromise his defence, pending a further appeal to the court in Madrid. I appeal to the Spanish authorities to reconsider the decision to move Kevan from the prison's remand module to his present location, which is unsuitable and in which he feels entirely isolated.

Together with Kevan's family, Fair Trials Abroad and the *Liverpool Echo*, I have been part of a campaign to free Kevan. Earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary kindly met me, together with Kevan's father, Tommy Sloan, and his mother, Eileen Forrester, who is in the Gallery today. My right hon. Friend recently raised Kevan's case with his Spanish opposite number, and I place on record my thanks and gratitude for his efforts.

Through his lawyer in Tenerife, Kevan has applied for a deportation order, which, if successful, could secure his release. He has gone to great lengths, however, to make it clear that, in so doing, he in no way accepts any guilt. My plea, and that of his family, is that Kevan's application for that order and his further appeal to the constitutional court in Madrid should be dealt with speedily and that he should be allowed to come home, where he belongs. In the meantime, I again urge the Spanish authorities to put him in a more friendly part of the prison with other English speakers.

Kevan has suffered far beyond anything that could be considered remotely reasonable for a crime that he did not commit. I hope that the Spanish authorities will take due note and act accordingly. I also hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe will ensure that those very real concerns and the details of this debate are passed to the Spanish authorities and that they take proper note of them.

1.12 pm

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) for bringing Kevan Sloan's worrying case to the attention of the House. He is a former Home Office Minister and a highly respected, senior Member of the House, and I hope that his passionate advocacy on Kevan Sloan's behalf will be heard loud and clear in Madrid. I shall certainly ensure that the full record of this debate is passed to the appropriate authorities in Spain.

Before responding in detail to my hon. Friend's speech on the case, however, I should refer briefly to the weekend's terrorist outrage in Bali. Our consular staff in

[Peter Hain]

London and Bali have been working round the clock to do all that they can to help the relatives of British citizens who were killed or injured, and they will continue to do so. The Minister responsible for consular matters, Baroness Amos, will travel to Bali this evening. I express my condolences to all those affected, both in this country and in Australia.

I welcome the opportunity to highlight the assistance that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has provided to Kevan Sloan and his family and to explain what consular assistance we can and cannot provide to him and other British nationals abroad. I reassure my hon. Friend that we are committed to supporting Mr. Sloan and, indeed, all British nationals who are detained overseas.

Since Mr. Sloan's detention, his family and supporters have campaigned vigorously for his acquittal and release. They believe that he is innocent, as does his Member of Parliament. They all believe that he has been the victim of an unfair trial, and Fair Trials Abroad has also been involved in the case. My hon. Friend's powerful speech today and detailed criticism of the prosecution's case will, I hope, give the Spanish authorities cause for further thought. I especially noted the points that he made about the paucity of identification evidence, Mr. Sloan's inability to speak Spanish, the robber's accent being quite different from his own, the alibi that he provided, and so on.

The House will confirm that MPs do not lightly speak with such power and conviction about such cases unless they are strongly persuaded of the issues involved. However, the British Government cannot make judgments on the innocence or guilt of British nationals detained abroad. Our consular staff provide the same service to those detained abroad irrespective of innocence or guilt. The role of our consular staff is, in essence, humanitarian. Consular staff are responsible for looking after the welfare of British nationals overseas, including those who are detained or imprisoned. They can ensure that British nationals have access to a lawyer, know their legal position, have information about the legal and prison systems, receive the same treatment as other prisoners and are not discriminated against because they are British or foreign, and that any medical problems are dealt with quickly. We take any complaints of ill treatment very seriously, and raise them immediately with the relevant authorities.

We are fully aware of the pressures and frustrations that having a relative detained abroad can place on a family. Consular staff can help to keep families in regular contact with those detained in a foreign country, and can assist in updating them on the progress of any court hearings. Staff can also pass on messages from family members to detainees, and forward money for prison comforts. Clearly, circumstances and conditions vary, but consular staff aim regularly to visit British nationals detained abroad. Those held on remand can usually expect three or four such visits a year.

Since Mr. Sloan's arrest in May 2001, our consular staff in Tenerife and London have been in regular contact with Mr. Sloan and his family. Our vice-consul visited Mr. Sloan within 72 hours of his detention, and consular staff have visited him a further 10 times since that date. Our staff have also facilitated visits by family members outside the usual visiting hours and at weekends by liaising with the prison authorities on behalf of the families. When Mr. Sloan expressed concern about his transfer to another part of the prison in September this year, our vice-consul contacted the prison authorities straight away to determine the reason for the transfer. She then contacted Mr. Sloan's lawyer to inform him of these developments and to ensure that family visits were not cancelled due to the transfer.

We have also maintained regular contact with Mr. Sloan's lawyer during significant periods such as his trial and more generally throughout his detention. We have therefore ensured that the family in the United Kingdom has been kept informed of any developments. Our consular staff are not legally trained; they cannot offer legal advice, and under international law neither they nor we can interfere in the judicial process of another sovereign country. We would not tolerate any interference in our own legal proceedings, although I know that my hon. Friend is not asking for that.

However, we have sought information regarding Mr. Sloan's trial through our consular staff in Tenerife. His lawyer has stated that although he is very unhappy with the outcome, he is entirely satisfied with the way in which the court handled proceedings. Mr. Sloan must follow the guidance of his lawyer and, of course, he was convicted under Spanish law. His family and supporters have pointed out what they believe are several deficiencies in the prosecution's case; my hon. Friend spoke eloquently about those this morning. However, those are entirely legal issues and as such must be addressed by Mr. Sloan's lawyer, who is best placed to offer professional legal guidance and to take up any concerns with the appropriate local and judicial authorities. All avenues are currently being considered, including the possible referral of this case to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office pro bono lawyer panel for review. I understand that this is a difficult and frustrating time for Mr. Sloan and his family. They are convinced that he was the victim of a miscarriage of justice and, with my hon. Friend's active support, are campaigning vigorously for his release. We have been asked many times to intervene on Mr. Sloan's behalf and have been pleased to do so.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was able to meet Mr. Sloan's parents on 30 May. He made it clear that, as I have said, we could not interfere in the legal process of another country, but agreed to make formal representations to his Spanish counterpart. He subsequently met the Spanish Foreign Minister, Josep Piqué, in June and his successor, Ana de Palacio, in September. On both occasions, my right hon. Friend raised Mr. Sloan's case and put the arguments that my hon. Friend has put today. Mrs. de Palacio agreed to look into Kevan Sloan's case and I am sure that, as a lawyer herself, she will have a particular understanding of the arguments that my hon. Friend has made today.

Meanwhile, we shall ensure that Mr. Sloan's family are kept fully informed of any developments. We shall continue to provide Mr. Sloan with all possible consular assistance. Our consular staff in Tenerife will continue to visit him and maintain frequent contact with his lawyer. I shall happily take any questions from my hon. Friend if he has further points to make, but I understand that Mr. Sloan's mother has travelled here to be present

at this debate. She has my sympathy in her quest for justice. We—our consular staff, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I—will stand ready to help in whatever way we can, given the constraints that are obvious to all when the independent judicial system of another country is involved.

Disability Living Allowance

1.21 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): When the present Government came to power in 1997, I asked the Minister then responsible whether the disability living allowance forms could be examined urgently to make them more user-friendly. More than five years later, nothing has happened, despite the assurances then given.

The forms are long and complex but do not provide adequate space for applicants to add to tick-box and one-word answers to illustrate their cases further. Often, that is why they are turned down. For example, if an applicant can walk 100 m unaided, the mobility claim will almost certainly fail. What of sufferers of myalgic encephalopathy—ME—and multiple sclerosis, who sometimes have reasonable days but more frequently have bad days when it is not possible to walk 100 m? I have come to realise that many constituents who appeal have to do so because, in all honesty, they did not present their case very well on the form, and failed to qualify statements or add to the basic questions. They therefore failed to reach the golden threshold of the number of points required.

A recent survey by the Motor Neurone Disease Association, published in June 2001, showed that 52 per cent. of those questioned received help to complete the claim form. Respondents described the form as "very confusing" and "a nightmare" and said:

"the forms are too long and the questions asked are the same over and over again."

There is, to my mind, a glaring conflict of interest in the way in which medical assessments are carried out. General practitioners are paid more than £100 for the visit and for completing the form. I could name one or two doctors in Gwynedd who fail everyone initially, regardless of their condition. It does not take rocket science to see that a GP could feel under pressure to turn down applicants and preserve the status quo, in order to preserve that rather lucrative sideline, rather than supporting the applicant. I raised that matter on the Floor of the House recently, and interestingly, not a single medical practitioner contacted me to suggest that I had got it wrong. GPs' services are secured through a third-party agency, but I repeat my contention that that obvious conflict of interest compromises them.

The MNDA supports what I have said. I shall quote from some responses that it received. One said that the appointments with doctors were made at very short notice, and another that the doctor

"was very rude and unhelpful. It felt like I was a scrounger."

Another said:

"He could not understand me very well because of my speech and had no idea of the severity of MND or its progression."

Another said:

"The assessment was totally degrading. My husband was totally humiliated. If we had known what the assessment was like we would not have gone through with it."

Furthermore, 58 per cent. of those questioned said that they had to wait for a month for such an assessment. The report says that only 46 per cent. of claimants received notification within one month that

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

their claim had been successful, and 11 per cent. of respondents reported having to wait more than three months for notification.

Over the past six to seven years, an increasing number of constituents have come to my advice surgeries seeking assistance to proceed with an appeal. They invariably begin by feeling overawed at the prospect of conducting a quasi-judicial appeal without assistance. Frequently they must rebut evidence from a medically qualified person. Many decide that they are not up to it and want to forget the whole thing, which is the last response that anyone would want. Others decide to battle on. As a respondent to the report recently said,

"The appeal was hard work for a person feeling unwell."

I am legally qualified and have conducted countless appeals, and I can see clearly that the appeal procedure is very difficult for appellants in person. Despite the fact that tribunals are invariably staffed by three caring individuals who are patently independent and go out of their way to put appellants at ease, the procedure is daunting, not least because at the back of every appellant's mind is the awful financial prospect of failing in their appeal.

Since 1992 I have conducted appeals five or six times a year, and only one of those 60 or so appeals failed. I should like to think that that success rate was due to the quality of my advice and advocacy, but I suspect that the real reason was that the appellants should not have been refused in the first place.

A layman such as I can often see that a person's condition is deteriorating and will deteriorate further. A tribunal recently took a few seconds to decide a case in favour of a constituent of mine, and made the benefit "for life", as it was before the benefit integrity project. Back in November 1998, the Minister then responsible told me,

"We shall continue to improve the process so as to ensure that the right benefit is paid to the right people. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we recently announced that, in due course, we wish to replace the benefit integrity project with a fair and sensitive system for ensuring that DLA cases are correct."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 587.]

To that I would say, "Hear, hear." However, the targets for savings achieved by the benefit integrity project were based on a belief that almost £499 million per year was involved, and that more than 12 per cent. of claimants were frauduient. Both those ideas were found to be totally unjustified. In fact, the savings achieved by the BIP—£8 million for 1997–98—have been totally wiped out by the administrative costs of £8.27 million for the same period. The cost of the new system of periodic review has yet to be estimated.

Little has happened to aid the sick and disabled, and they continue to be subjected to degrading treatment every three years or so. The project was supposed to be replaced by something that was fairer, but I fear that the periodic review is no fairer and is just the benefit integrity project under another name.

I shall give some brief examples of cases that I have conducted. A Mr. Roberts in my constituency had his left leg amputated after a road accident in 1995. He received high rate mobility from September 1995–96, which was cut down to middle rate from September 1996–98. He asked for a review in March 1997, received nothing until August and wrote back with the paperwork in November, only to be turned down on the grounds that he was out of time. I complained on his behalf, and the disability benefits director said that it was clear that Mr. Roberts had not received the standard of service to which he was entitled. The appeal went forward in August 1999, and his claim was allowed fully on appeal, nearly three years after it was refused.

A young woman from near Bala in my constituency was awarded the highest rate mobility component because she was suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome. She received the high rate from April 1994-98, reapplied in January 1998 and was refused. She asked for a review in February and was refused again. She sent in some other details, and eventually won an appeal—again, more than two years later. A lady in my constituency from Corris made her first application in March 2000 and was refused. She was suffering from severe arthritis. We appealed on her behalf, and the appeal came through in February 2002, nearly two years later.

A man called Patrick Breen in my constituency had his disability living allowance discontinued in October 1998, having suffered an unsuccessful knee operation in 1997 and further surgery in 1998. He partially lost his sight in 1994. He has recently had confirmation from doctors that he also had osteoarthritis. His doctor expressed surprise that the personal care element was disallowed, and said:

"at this current time I feel that a high level of personal care is of the utmost necessity".

I wrote on Mr. Breen's behalf on 27 October 1998 and did not receive a reply until 10 January 1999. The case went to appeal—in April 2002, believe it or not—and it succeeded on all points. That is another example of a few years wasted, anxiety created and so on.

A young man from Trefriw in my constituency, who suffers severely from myalgic encephalomyelitis, was turned down. He, too, had to appeal. While he was appealing, he was unable to heat his home properly or look after himself because of lack of finances. That is a disgraceful catalogue. Time does not permit me to deal with other cases that I could mention.

The Government have made some movement. The Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations 2002 will affect between 40,000 and 50,000 claimants. The new rules relate to lower rate mobility component, which is paid to people who can walk, but cannot walk outdoors in unfamiliar places unless they have someone with them—because of a visual impairment, for example. The alterations relate to claims based on fear and anxiety. A new provision, regulation 12(7), was inserted into the DLA regulations, stating that people who cannot take advantage of the faculty of walking outdoors without guidance or supervision from another person because of fear or anxiety will not be eligible for lower rate mobility component.

A second paragraph, paragraph (8), will state that regulation 12(7) is to be ignored if the fear or anxiety is

"(a) a symptom of a mental disability; and

(b) so severe as to prevent the person from taking advantage of the faculty in such circumstances."

The intention is that people who claim on the basis of fear or anxiety—because of agoraphobia, for example—will still be able to do so, but people who cannot demonstrate that their fear or anxiety is a symptom of a severe mental health problem will not be eligible for lower rate mobility component.

The Government claim that they are simply clarifying the law, rather than making changes. However, the new rule means that the often severe psychological effects of physical impairment must in future be ignored for the purposes of lower rate mobility component. That is an entirely new rule.

A growing number of voluntary bodies are becoming greatly concerned at the operation of the DLA—not surprisingly, perhaps, given what I have already said. The Headway Association recently wrote to me. In essence, its concern is about the DLA assessment process. It believes that the DLA is too fixated on finding physical or mental health problems and does not allow the recognition of cognitive difficulties, often the result of a head injury, which can cause problems as severe or worse than physical or mental health impairments.

As for the unfairness of the DLA assessment process, the Headway Association says that the DLA assessments place heavy reliance on independent fixed format medical assessments. They will often require the brain-injured person to explain convincingly in the interview how their condition impacts on their care and mobility needs. However, due to their cognitive impairment they might be unable to explain that to the medical examiner.

The Headway Association's experience of clinicians, particularly general practitioners, is that their professional knowledge of brain injury and its impact on the individual is sparse. Additionally, Headway Association members have experienced a range of attitudes from examining medical practitioners. Some are very mechanical in following the medical assessment script, while others are more discretionary, and we must query what assessment training is given.

Individuals with a brain injury may be deemed mentally competent yet suffer impairment of their cognitive abilities that directly impacts on their care and mobility needs. Even medical examiners who are enlightened on the subject of brain injury point out that they are required only to assess mental competence, not cognitive ability. As it is the province of clinical neuro-psychologists, it is unrealistic to expect cognitive ability to be reliably assessed by a non-expert medical examiner, typically a general practitioner, during a routine medical interview and examination, which, as I have said, often takes place swiftly and at short notice.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Does my hon. Friend agree that the gap in the training of doctors who assess the DLA leads to wide variations, even in small geographical areas? That is widely seen as being entirely unfair.

Mr. Llwyd: I agree entirely. The DLA is, unfortunately, like postcode prescription. Cognitive ability is often the crux of the matter but it is not addressed, which is a haphazard way of doing things.

I wholeheartedly endorse the recommendations made by Headway:

"A separate section on cognitive ability should be included within the DLA questionnaire and medical interview.

For the EMP following the DSS assessment script, and where brain injury is claimed or diagnosed, a supplementary sheet of specialist questions could be devised to assess the cognitive and executive reasoning difficulties. There could be a number of them to target a particular neurological condition. In cases of alleged mental problems for those applying for incapacity benefit there is the opportunity to complete additional questions on how their condition affects their ability to work. Medical examiners are obliged to consider this when the problem becomes apparent during the interview. Where there is doubt, and to guard against the possibility of fraud, EMPs, Adjudication Officers and tribunals should be authorised to refer applicants who claim brain injury to a suitably approved clinical neuro-psychologist. They could produce independent reports on the cognitive difficulties of the applicant and how they have impacted on the care and mobility needs of the applicant.

The medical assessment procedure should be more flexible to allow the input of the carer. To give a complete picture of a person with a brain injury during an assessment it is often necessary to have their main carer present. This will help where a person's self image is at odds with their actual abilities."

I reiterate my call to the Government to review the application forms and make them more user-friendly. The periodical review procedure should be ended for cases in which a recipient of DLA has already succeeded once on appeal. I have been a Member of Parliament for more than 10 years and I am going through the third appeal with some applicants. Their condition worsens with every appeal, for which we have to wait through months of anxiety to present. I do not mind doing it—I am proud to do it—because it is part of my function. However, I say to the Minister that it is a waste of the tribunal's time and is grossly unfair and hurtful to people who feel "done" by the system.

It is also time to speed up the system. The examples that I have given are typical of the length of time an appeal takes. The system is currently failing the most vulnerable in our society, which will not do.

1.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on choosing the subject for today's debate. The matter is of great interest to all hon. Members. He has raised a number of issues on which I shall do my best to comment.

First, I want to say a little about the DLA because there are some misconceptions—I am not saying that the hon. Gentleman has misconceptions—about what the benefit does and does not do. I shall set out the aim of the DLA before answering some of the hon. Gentleman's specific questions. It is a non-contributory, tax-free benefit that is not income related. It is there to contribute to the extra costs incurred by severely disabled people because of their additional mobility and care needs. It is not an extra payment for people with a particular condition. That is one of the things that most confuses people about the benefit; some think that because they have a certain condition, they should receive it. That might explain the point about variations that was made in an earlier intervention. It is possible for two people to have the same condition, but for their care

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and mobility needs to be very different. The system is designed to try to assess what those needs are on an individual basis.

Hywel Williams: Is the Minister claiming that decisions are entirely consistent from one assessment officer to another? I have encountered examples of people with very similar conditions seen by different doctors; Dr. Nice has allowed it but Dr. Nasty has not.

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman has identified one of the problems of trying to administer the benefit: it has a large subjective element. That is partly because it is trying to deal with the effects on a particular person in a particular situation of a particular condition or disability. There is bound to be a certain amount of subjectivity, whether of the decision maker or the doctor.

Our job in administering the benefit is to try to be as consistent as possible, but it is not to achieve equality in benefit between two people with a particular condition. Because of the way in which it is designed, the benefit has to deal with the effect on the individual of the health condition or disability. There are difficulties in terms of consistency, and in terms of the many issues raised by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and his colleague, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Williams).

For the record, I accept that there are sometimes difficulties in accessing the benefit. Every Member of this House has had constituency cases in which things have gone wrong. We try to minimise errors and to put things right when they go wrong, but there is an inherent difficulty in administering this benefit. In the last five years, expenditure on DLA has increased by 23 per cent. in real terms, to some £6.5 billion, and 2.35 million disabled people are in receipt of it. That is an increase of some 15 per cent. over the last five years. There is no evidence that the difficulties of claiming are preventing people from accessing the benefit. The trend is upwards; we are getting the benefit to people who are eligible for it as best we can.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy will accept that the need for care and help with mobility is a personal matter and varies between individuals. The affects of a particular disability can vary from person to person, according to circumstances. It is therefore difficult to be objective. The diversity of cases for which the benefit has to cater makes it inherently difficult to administer. We have embarked on a programme of improvements, but the hon. Gentleman says that he has not seen much evidence of that. I shall go through some of the things that we have done, and some of the things that we are hoping to do, now that we are introducing a proper IT system into the disability benefit unit, which we have not had until now. The hon. Gentleman will know that one of our difficulties in respect of the benefit is that it has been clerically administered. That has its own difficulties, because there are inefficiencies in clerical administration, especially when files are sent to Blackpool and have to be sent back.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a predecessor of mine who said that the Government's aim was to get people's benefits right at the outset and keep them right. That is indeed our aim. We are trying to develop processes that will make the system simpler, more straightforward and more responsive to the needs of disabled people who claim disability benefits. We are trying to remove the need for a single "catch all" claim pack, the difficulties of which were referred to by the hon. Gentleman. The claim pack must enable people to set out the effect of their condition or disability on their care and mobility needs, so we need more than a form that asks people what condition they have. The claim pack is bound to be long and more complex than we would like, but we are currently developing a new claiming process both for attendance allowance, which is being trialed, and for disability living allowance. In tests, we have managed to reduce the claim pack for attendance allowance from 44 to 16 pages. We are hoping to be able to replicate that for disability living allowance, although DLA is slightly more complex because of the mobility component. The trials on the AA claim pack for very elderly people have been fairly successful and we hope to apply the lessons that we have learned from that to DLA.

Features of the first stage of the process include a shortened interactive claim form completed through discussion with the customer on the telephone. I accept that people with impairments of various sorts can find it very difficult to complete forms, but the benefit inquiry line should be able to help them. Customers can talk to someone on the telephone, text phone is available, and there are other ways in which customers can access the service. We hope to be able to tailor questions to the customer's needs rather than them having to answer all the questions that might be useful. We hope that medical evidence relating to previous claims, already held by the Department, will be used to speed up the decision process. That might answer some of the hon. Gentleman's points about repeat claims. At the moment, all the information is held in files in Blackpool and is not immediately accessible. Once the IT system is up and running, we should be able to access such information instantly.

Mr. Llwyd: I appreciate the fact that the Minister is responding to the subject in a thoughtful and helpful way, something that does not often happen in such debates. I follow her arguments, but there is a problem with the helpline, because many people have difficulty speaking about their private affairs and some have speech difficulties. Does the Minister agree that it seems ridiculous that a person who has a degenerative disease and who has succeeded on appeal the first time around, should be put through the hoops two or three times subsequently? Surely that is wrong.

Maria Eagle: I shall come to the latter point in due course because there are particular issues relating to chronic and deteriorating conditions.

In respect of the helpline, if customers find it impossible to get the help that they need, we do our best to arrange home visits. We try to make arrangements that will suit the customer. It is not in our interests for inadequate claim forms to be returned because that just extends the process. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that we want to administer the benefit, which has inherent difficulties, as well as we possibly can, with the aim of getting to eligible people the money that they

need as soon as possible without the hassle that they might have previously experienced. We are all on the same side in that we all want to get this right.

On IT, we are beginning to acquire the capability to access information relating to previous claims more quickly. We are not there yet, but we are introducing IT in disability benefit units where initial claims are handled. We hope that, in due course, we shall see significant improvements as a result.

At every stage, development proposals on claim forms are presented to a forum of disability organisations, the modern service working group, to ensure that the changes meet the needs of and are in the best interests of disabled people and are not just administrative expedients. Those organisations can tell us whether we are on the right track. I hope that hon. Members will accept that we are doing our best to improve the administration, although I accept that there are still problems with it.

The hon. Gentleman more or less said that there is a continuation of the benefit integrity project and that periodic inquiry is no fairer than the benefit integrity project. Periodic inquiry was designed to do something very different from the benefit integrity project. Whereas the benefit integrity project appears to have been designed by the previous Administration to meet targets, periodic inquiry is a random check. Cases are chosen randomly from the case load and a visiting officer is sent out to complete the form. The idea is to try to ensure that people receive the right benefit. In fact, it is far more frequently the case that the benefits of someone who has gone through a periodic inquiry are increased rather than decreased, which gives the lie to the idea that periodic inquiry is the same as the benefit integrity project.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Does the Minister have any statistics to back up her assertion that periodic reviews result in great news for people who are receiving benefit?

Maria Eagle: I do indeed. In fact, the hon. Lady has anticipated my next remark.

Results from the first two years of periodic inquiry have identified that in 75 per cent. of the cases where care or mobility needs changed, the inquiry led to higher entitlement. That gives the lie to the idea that periodic inquiry is the benefit integrity project with a different name. In fact, customer reaction to it has generally been very positive. When I visit those of my officials in disability benefit units who do periodic inquiries, I always ask them what reaction they get when they knock on people's doors. Generally, I am told that they and the process are welcomed. One might understand why that might be the case, as 75 per cent. of the cases result in increased benefit. I do not recognise the description of periodic inquiry as some form of rehashed benefit integrity project. Its aim is to ensure that people get the right benefits for their needs.

The hon. Gentleman complained that sometimes people have to reapply for their benefits. Sometimes people on indefinite awards do not have to reapply. It might become clear that their needs have increased when we visit them on a periodic inquiry. Our aim is to try to get people on the right level of benefit so that they get the support to which they are entitled, not to cut the costs on a targeted basis, which I understand was the purpose of the benefit integrity project.

I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman has come across examples where periodic inquiry has seemed to operate like the benefit integrity project. If he would provide me with individual examples—obviously, not today—I would be more than happy to review them. It is certainly not our general impression from what comes back to us or from our statistics.

The hon. Gentleman rushed through some points about GPs at the beginning of his remarks, and it was not clear to me whether he was referring to the GP reports for which a decision maker might ask if they need more evidence because they are not sure about a form that has been returned, or whether he was referring to the examining medical practitioner or some combination of both.

Mr. Llwyd: It is the EMP.

Maria Eagle: The EMP is someone to whom our decision maker can resort if they do not feel that they have enough information to make a determination of the claim. It is certainly true that some of them are GPs. It is also true that our contractor SchlumbergerSema has been strengthening its management of the contracting doctors, at our behest. They receive significantly more training than they used to on appropriate behaviour.

I know that there are complaints about individual EMPs. I encourage hon. Members and their constituents to complain if they have come across any EMP whom they believe is behaving in an offhand way, making assumptions or not treating them with due respect and dignity. Arrangements are in place with SchlumbergerSema to deal with complaints in a way that can result in an EMP, a GP, or whoever is doing the report, being thrown off our lists, as people are. If there are sufficient numbers of complaints, we will investigate them. Some doctors are retrained.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister has been generous in the debate. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon is here. He and I have a complaint in common. I will not name the person here despite privilege, but he has been reported to the General Medical Council and remains on the books of the third party—the contractor.

Maria Eagle: I should be happy to have further details from the hon. Gentleman if he would like to forward them to me. Under the new contract with SchlumbergerSema, strengthened procedures are in place to ensure that doctors who do not do their job appropriately do not do it at all. It is not our intention to subject disabled people and people with health conditions to degrading treatment or to make them jump through hoops to receive benefit. That is not what we are about. The hon. Gentleman must surely agree that we sometimes need more evidence than that provided on the form, and that sometimes there is no alternative to an examining medical practitioner. However, there is no reason why people should experience what he has described as happening to his constituents. We want to stamp that out. If he would like to send me details of the individual in question, I will look further into what he has said. I am aware that there are EMPs who have been removed from the lists and

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who no longer receive instructions to deal with this sort of case. It is not the case that removal never happens; it does, but we need to have the complaints to ensure that we pursue the bad eggs.

The hon. Gentleman made some important points about what Headway had to say to him about cognitive impairments and brain injury. We want to ensure that our procedures get to the nub of the issue and that those people who are eligible for the benefit receive it.

We are always open to representations about such issues, and I encourage Headway and other organisations to contact us. We have training and guidance for our decision makers about how such issues should be dealt with, but I do not pretend that it is perfect. We can always improve it, but we do set out to ensure that it is as good as it can be. I have some problems with the hon. Gentleman's suggestion about referring to clinical neuro-psychologists. We are not in the business of trying to medicalise the benefit beyond the degree to which it has already been medicalised—there are doctors' reports. Disabled people would not like that. They do not want the benefit to be turned into an assessment of how bad their condition is. The benefit is about dealing with care and mobility needs, and the person best placed to tell us what those needs are is the person concerned or their family and friends. That is the basis of the benefit, so we must be careful not to go too far away from that. I therefore have some concerns about the idea of bringing in clinical neuro-psychologists if it can be avoided. It would also be bound to lead to more delays. However, I am happy to take up issues and points that some of my officials raised about particular problems. The issues that Headway raised with the hon. Gentleman are also important.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about the changes to the lower rate mobility benefit. There have been debates in the other place about that issue, but I reiterate that the aim of that change was to keep the benefit true to its original intentions. It is not the case that people who have fear and anxiety and a physical impairment cannot receive the lower rate mobility benefit. We hope that the change will affect only a very small number of people, and I hope, given what I have been able to say to him today, that the hon. Gentleman will accept that that is by no means all that we have been doing to try to improve the administration of DLA and to ensure that those who are eligible for the benefit receive it, receive it quickly, and at the level to which they are entitled.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 17 October 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Road Traffic Speed

[Relevant documents: Ninth Report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2001-02 HC557-I, and the Government response thereto, Cm 5621.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

2.30 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Last year in this country, we killed 3,450 people, seriously injured 37,110 and slightly injured 272,749 on the roads. There was, however, no great public outcry. There was no mass lobby of Parliament, nor people running into the streets producing banners because we have, extraordinarily, almost become accustomed to the fact that people die in road accidents. It is as if the great hand of God has fallen on them to bring down some well-deserved punishment, whereas in reality there is a direct connection between the human being, the motor vehicle, and death on the roads.

It is tremendously important that the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions decided to look into the issue because it was so concerned, not only about public attitudes but about the attitudes of Government and elected representatives to the startling and frightening facts. Had there been an equal number of deaths from any other cause, there would have been an enormous outcry and we would all have received vast numbers of letters. We have talked for some time about the need to do something about the number of deaths on the roads, but many of the contributory elements have become obscured. This is one of the most important reports that the Select Committee, under the previous banner of Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, managed to produce. It certainly received an enormous response from the general public.

I am used to receiving letters that refer to me as an antisocial old socialist bitch— and to that I might even plead guilty; I see no reason to discount any such gentle descriptions of my character—but many of those letters encompassed exactly what is wrong with our attitude towards road death. Many of them were intensely personal, not in the sense that people recounted only their personal experiences, as one might expect, but in that they argued that we must have cars, we must be able to drive them as fast as we like and, in many instances, we must not comply with the more irritating rules of the road, the deliberate purpose of which is to restrict the motorist. That is revealing because it shows how large the gap is between the reality of what we do with motor vehicles and the public perception. We wanted to address that gap in the report.

We were able to say:

"Most deaths of car occupants take place on rural roads, but most crashes and pedestrian deaths occur in urban areas."

We were able to highlight the number of children who are injured or killed by motor vehicles. We were able to point out the facts—not new, but well known—that large numbers of children suffer because they live in more deprived areas, are more likely to be playing out in the street close to dangerous roads and are often not as well supervised as they might be.

We considered who was responsible for speeding, why they speed and what reasons they give. It became obvious that many drivers did not know the speed limits. They do not regard speeding as a serious offence, and think that they are unlikely to get caught. They do not appreciate the damage that they do, because others bear most of the cost. They may be in a hurry or feel pressured—many of those who break speed limits are on work-related journeys. The comfort of their cars and the design of the roads mean that it "feels right"—a frequently given reason—to drive quicker than is legal or safe.

Lest hon. Members think that the Committee was exaggerating, I should say that individual Members expressed frightening views during our attempts to reach an agreement on the text. People said, "Of course I ought to be able to drive my car very fast after I reach Manchester in the middle of the night, because I am a good driver and I am totally in control of the car." Indeed, I learned a new declension: I am a good driver; he, she or it is not as good as me but ought to be allowed to drive; he, she or it is totally incapable of driving and should not in any circumstances be allowed to drive. That seemed to relate to everyone who those people met on the road. None the less, all of them were clear about motorists' need for a policy that enabled them to drive as they thought fit.

After many years of large-scale road safety campaigns, we are failing to convince even large numbers of motorists that there is a direct connection between speed and death. Anyone who worked in accident and emergency, or anyone who watched the mangled bodies being taken off motorways, could tell us about it. Any member of the motorway police could tell us of the strain put on them by constantly having to attend frightening accidents. They all know the cost of disastrous road accidents not only in terms of bones broken and lives destroyed, but in terms of the effect on large numbers of families. Despite that, we still do not appear to be putting the required drive, energy and sums of money into our concern about what is important.

The Government are serious about wanting to do something, but we were considerably worried by lacunae in the reply to our report. We considered how Departments across Whitehall did not necessarily work together to achieve the ends that are needed. We looked at the fact that the Home Office did not put sufficient emphasis on the likes of road traffic policing. One would have thought that that was obvious, but when people talk about the core policies for policing, road traffic work is not at the top of the list where it should be—even though it must constitute a large amount of the costs and difficulties presented to police forces.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): On that point about Departments supporting the priorities for casualty

[Mr. David Kidney]

reduction, the Home Office is about to produce the first national policing plan. Would my hon. Friend expect to see a reference to road traffic policing in it?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I most certainly would. We said that we ought to have a national speed management strategy, so that is exactly the type of measure we want.

The national health service bears not only the practical brunt of having to deal with many policies, but the costs of having to deal with those injured and sick. It should therefore be one of the key bodies that decide policies, where they could be improved and how we could change public attitudes towards what we think is essential.

We said that a national speed management strategy ought to be established that would

"highlight the effect of decreases in speed on reducing casualties",

and encourage local authorities to be active in setting targets and reducing numbers of casualties. We also said that we ought to consider

"examples of success and good practice".

However, there were several points that the Government clearly failed to address, and I want to put them in context.

We said that it was important to have a hierarchy of rural roads. There is already a clear set of distinctions, because people assume rural roads are safe when they are not. The reason why we spent so much time discussing the need for specific controls outside rural schools and in rural villages was because we recognised that fact. However, the Government reply said:

"It would be costly financially and environmentally. Given the infrastructure and behavioural changes required, the road safety and quality of life benefits would take too long to realise."

I am not sure what that means. Does it mean that because it is going to cost a lot and is difficult to do, we should not start? Frankly, the problem costs a lot at the moment, especially to Government Departments. What do the Government mean when they say that

"benefits would take too long to realise."?

Too long for what—for the current Government or the next, or for the people whom we represent, or for the 2010 targets? I want a clearer statement than that. We must assume that the policy is a long-term one and get on with it. Of course, it will take time to implement, but does that mean that we should never start, even if we can show that it would bring significant casualty reduction benefits? I do not think so.

We were also concerned about those famous safety cameras. I may as well be honest with the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, as he is a straightforward Minister who does his best to reply to all the difficulties we raise. The Government sometimes seem to allow themselves to be led a bit by the press—especially, dare I say it, the tabloid press. What research have the Government done and what evidence is there that we would do much better if we had bright yellow cameras that are clearly visible to the motorist from a great distance? How do they know that that would be more successful than continuing our existing policy, which is not to hide the cameras but to put them where they are not necessarily immediately noticeable, and to use the evidence that that produces?

We have research on what safety cameras achieve, but no evidence to suggest that we should have a policy whereby motorists are told that they are being monitored when they break the law. People do not put notices on their houses saying, "If you burgle here, you will be in a certain amount of difficulty." We assume that people know that they will be in trouble if they break the law. Why are bright yellow speed cameras that can be seen from a considerable distance essential? The evidence is that, far from improving road safety, such devices slow down motorists where they can see the camera and allow them to speed up as soon as they get around the corner. I do not think that that is what anyone wants, and I am certain that it is not what the Government want. They are simply responding to pressures, when the issues should be considered more closely. Why is there no consistency about where we direct resources? Either we decide that we should have camera partnerships and that the police should have the same duty, or we leave the situation as it is.

Turning to the question of leadership, the Government have a responsibility to show that they take road casualty figures seriously all the time, and not only occasionally. They must show that their measures are part of a long, consistent and urgent policy, because that is the only way to persuade the general public. Even today, we received a briefing from a normally responsible motoring organisation that suggested that people wore seat belts only because they had had a long period of education. People wear seat belts because it is the law. They started to wear seat belts because it was the law, not because someone was seeking to persuade them.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is when the law changes that attitudes change? Seat belts provide an example: before the law was changed, there was a great hostility to them; straight afterwards everyone accepted them.

Mrs. Dunwoody: In one accident and emergency department in the middle of London, the day after the seat belt legislation came in, some 40 per cent. of the accident work disappeared. That was as clear as daylight. The Government should push hard to ensure that people understand these things and that they respond to them.

We can ask the Government to do a better job in several respects. Why have they not responded to the recommendation that they should identify how much a comprehensive national package of traffic calming measures would cost? The reality is that people do not respond to being told to drive slowly; they need some form of control.

How are local authorities expected to produce the large transport programmes that they are required to deliver, having received large capital allocations? We heard evidence that more and more local authorities face difficulties in finding trained staff—not people who are prepared to accept responsibility, but people with very specific skills. They need the sort of parallel investment in training and revenue that would enable them to employ staff who are capable of carrying out the type of policy that the Government want implemented.

I finish on what is, for me, one of the most important parts of this important report—the matter of child pedestrian deaths. The Government's response, which is

that they are going to "commission further analyses" of the very high child pedestrian fatality rates throughout the United Kingdom is extremely disappointing. Why was there a three-year delay before further research was requested? Why are we still waiting for what we already know to be underlined? Why are we waiting for so many traffic safety schemes that will separate major traffic streams from pedestrians? That is one of the easiest and most sensible ways of contributing to safety.

We need lower speed limits. More local authorities must look into what happens not only near schools, but in residential areas. Why is the design of local distributor and residential roads, which could provide a more forgiving road environment, or the provision of money needed to encourage local authorities to go ahead with such policies, still not being pushed at Government level? Why have we still not got right our attitudes towards simple things like road crossings?

Such policies are vital. The developments to which we would have expected the Government to respond have been quietly brushed aside. The Government say that intelligent speed adaptation should be taken forward by industry in response to public demand, not by the introduction of a mandatory requirement for suitable devices, but we know that industry does not respond with either the speed or the urgency that are essential for major policy change.

Those well-meaning media programmes that constantly refer both to vehicles and to speed do not require viewers to consider the implications of a public education policy about speed. We tried hard to get evidence from the television companies, and they were prepared to talk to us, but even the BBC did not seem to understand that part of its public remit ought to be to persuade people of the harm we are doing to so many children and other people through our neglect and carelessness.

I pay tribute to those who helped me with this report. That is not just the Members of Parliament from the previous Committee, but our senior Clerk, Dr. Harrison, and Mr. Rob Gifford, who was one of our most valued and important advisers.

I want to say one thing to the House. As elected Members, we have special responsibilities. Sometimes, we have responsibilities to lead, and sometimes to follow. In this case, I hope that we will lead. I hope that we will not continue with the carnage that we accept day by day. We cannot allow emergency services to be diverted so frequently to dealing with the effects of people's carelessness and incompetence. We must be prepared to sort out the money to change not just the mechanical things that Government and local authorities can do, but the attitudes of those who respond to them.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend's peroration. There is one area that does not directly affect the new Ministry, but which has had an enormous impact on a small number of cases in which I have been involved, and that is sentencing. One talks about fines and disqualification, but in the ultimate cases—those of death or serious injury—there is certainly confusion in the criminal law over which sanctions should be applied. There also seems to be much confusion concerning the role that insurance companies play in protecting the injured party, or the party who may have committed the offence. Would my hon. Friend like to say a few things about our need to sort that area out, as well as the lesser offences?

Mrs. Dunwoody: That is why I said specifically that we needed to consider all of Government policy throughout Whitehall. I certainly do think that the insurance industry has a very specific role to play. Through training, magistrates can be encouraged to take such matters very seriously. On bad days, I sometimes say that if I wanted to get rid of anybody, I would do it with a motor vehicle not only because it is more efficient, but because I could escape suitable punishment more often than not.

We should be looking at the involvement of the police, the highways authorities, the Government and all the relevant private sector organisations. We should really be saying to the public at large, "You have in your hands, in partnership with the Government, the ability to reduce road deaths and injuries, and that is something we desperately need to do in this country. We are careless of human life. Help us to change that." I say to the Government that they must lead and urgently implement policies that will have a material effect. Above all, they must understand that to be popular in this particular field is to finish up abandoning many adults and children to an uncertain future.

2.53 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I start by echoing the words of thanks of the Chairman of the Committee to all those who worked with us on the preparation of the most substantial report that the Committee has produced during the past year. Its coverage of an important subject is comprehensive in breadth and depth. As ever, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) for the customarily expert and fair way in which she chaired the inquiry, which has made a valuable contribution to an important debate in this country.

Far too often, we allow ourselves to be distracted by high profile and distressing incidents in other modes of transportation, while forgetting the serious issues affecting our roads, where there are casualty numbers that would be totally unacceptable in any other form of transport. It is therefore all the more appropriate that the Select Committee should have worked on this useful contribution to the debate. I hope that the Government will take note of many of the recommendations made in shaping future policy.

It is important to note in any discussion on road safety that we have some of the safest roads in Europe, but within an overall picture of good, albeit still unacceptable, figures on accidents and casualties on our roads compared with our European partners, the report identifies a specific problem in urban areas. The number of fatalities and serious injuries, including injuries to children and other pedestrians, is unacceptably high and needs to be tackled.

It is clear from our discussions that improvements could and should be made to Government policy on the deployment of resources and to the regulations that affect how our roads are monitored and policed. The resourcing of policing in particular does not fall within

[Chris Grayling]

the remit of the Minister's Department, but in an environment in which Ministers need to talk across Departments, he needs to play an important role in the debate.

The Minister will be aware that the Government are currently reviewing the resources available to police forces throughout the country. That review is likely to lead to significant changes in future funding for police forces. The evidence to date suggests that there is likely to be a transfer of resources from what are undoubtedly the most congested parts of the country, such as the south-east of England, to urban areas and parts of the north. The likely consequence of that is serious for the policing of our roads.

If, as a result of Government formula changes, a home counties force is faced with the loss of 2, 3 or 4 per cent. of its budget every year for the next few years, that cannot but have an impact on the policing issues to which the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred. The home counties are the most congested parts of our country: their motorways are jammed and over-congested, and people take diversions down country roads and narrow lanes in an attempt to find a faster route to work. I hope that the Minister will impress on his colleagues that the Government cannot afford to allow traffic policing to be eroded, with the consequent adverse effect on safety standards on our roads.

That is happening at a time when the behaviour of some motorists is alarmingly inappropriate. Anyone who travels outside London at the weekend will be aware of the sometimes erratic behaviour of motor cyclists and motorists on country roads, such as driving at high speed and other dangerous driving. If that sort of behaviour is not properly monitored because our police forces do not have the resources to watch roads where they know a problem exists, not only will that problem not disappear, but it will worsen. I hope that the Minister will have a quiet word with some of his ministerial colleagues and make clear to them the consequences of under-resourcing policing in areas where road policing is a particular issue.

I draw the Minister's attention to the signage of speed limits in urban areas, which the report touches on. The issue concerns me because there are too many roads in this country where it is unclear to most drivers how fast they are allowed to drive. Too many roads have the feel of a 40 or 50 mph limit, but are actually 30 mph. Local authorities throughout the country would dearly love to provide clearer signage on urban roads to remind people that they can travel only at 30 mph. It is madness that in this day and age it is illegal for a local authority to put up a 30 mph repeater sign. That rule exists for historic reasons dating back to the 1930s, but when local authorities are putting up cardboard signs on street lamps, painting diamonds on roads, and finding any way they can to remind people that they are in a 30 mph zone, surely it is not beyond the wit of the Government to find a legal framework that will allow them to do that properly and effectively wherever they perceive a problem. I hope that the Minister will take that relatively simple step and ensure that authorities have the powers that they need to take local decisions where they believe a problem threatens or one already exists.

The principle of local decision making is also relevant to the rules about the siting of speed cameras, on which the report touched. As the Committee discussed the issues, we found it extraordinary that the framework for decisions about the siting of cameras was so rigid. I do not argue for a mass proliferation of speed cameras, but surely a police force or local authority should be able to draw attention to a stretch of road where circumstances have changed. Perhaps there is a new housing estate or a new road connection that has increased traffic levels, or perhaps traffic flow in general has expanded dramatically.

The police force or local authority might perceive a risk of a serious incident occurring. Perhaps there have been several minor incidents, and they fear something more serious. Surely it should not be Government policy to insist that they may not site a speed camera at that potential black spot until the accident that they are trying to prevent has happened. I hope that the Minister will think through that element of the Government guidelines again. Common sense suggests that a simple modification of the rules to allow local decision making would not distort the system, but could prevent some of the problems that the Chairman of the Committee and other hon. Members identified in the report.

The third element we picked out was the bias in Government safety spending towards other modes of transport. Huge resources go into the railways to prevent accidents on the mode of transport that is undoubtedly the safest. If a tiny fraction of the money spent on rail safety were spent on school pedestrian crossings, it could make a significant difference to safety standards on urban roads throughout the country.

I hope that as the Government review policy for the future, they will take a step back and say, "Yes, of course we need to invest in safety on our railways. We need to invest in safety for our aviation systems and on buses and coaches, but we must ensure that not all the money goes to other modes of transport and that enough is left over to pay for schemes that can make a real difference." When parents have to mount a vigorous campaign to secure the money for one crossing, as they had to in my constituency recently, we realise just how little is in the pot. However, I hope that when the Government consider how the cake is distributed, they will consider the impact on safety that the smallest schemes can have and ensure that they are not squeezed out by grand projects.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On that very useful point, does the hon. Gentleman recognise that, on occasion, the Government do stump up the money, and we are grateful for it? In my constituency, for example, one trunk road across the Pennines was an accident black spot. After two four-year-olds were killed, there was a huge local campaign and petition that, in a six-month period—not long in Government terms—resulted in their stumping up £500,000 for speed cameras. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the message is starting to get across, although we need to go much further?

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Lady for those comments. In many ways, she shares the experience of my constituents, because the campaign to which I referred followed the tragic death of a small girl. No one

would suggest that the Government get everything wrong. This Government, like previous ones, have done many good things on safety. Our roads have become much safer in recent generations, which is down to the good work of good people in Governments of all political persuasions. However, as the hon. Lady says, that does not mean that it is not the job of hon. Members to bite the ankles of Ministers and say, "You could do more if you did this."

We must all encourage people to take greater responsibility for safety issues. That includes not only motor cyclists going around country lanes at extraordinarily high speeds, or car drivers who take delight in racing each other on a Sunday afternoon, but also people who ride bicycles in urban areas. They may be the victims of inappropriate driving practices and are often killed or injured as a result, but many themselves break the rules of the road on too many occasions. I suspect that everyone in this Room has stood at a pedestrian crossing in London when the traffic lights were at red and a cyclist has sped through at high speed, paying no attention to the rules of the road.

There is a responsibility on the shoulders of pedestrians who jaywalk, on cyclists who ignore red lights and on those who use the roads irresponsibly to take a step back and say, "Perhaps I shouldn't be doing that." It is the job of hon. Members in our community roles, the job of Governments, who have a remit in public education, and the job of the other agencies with which we come into contact and can encourage, to steer our society towards better behaviour when safety is at stake.

The report is a useful contribution to the debate. I hope the Government will take up the many ideas, insights and pointers it offers. I have already apologised to the Minister for being unable to stay for the winding-up speeches, but I know from his previous comments, and from his nodding head while I have been speaking, that he is listening and taking on board what is said. I hope that some of the ideas in the report will not be merely discussion points but will be followed through as actions in due course.

3.6 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I start by congratulating the Committee on the report, especially the Chairman of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). The report contains a great many facts and the experiences of people throughout the country. It seeks to deal with an ever-increasing problem: speeding on our roads and the dangers that it causes.

I learned a great deal from the report, which clearly shows what we can do if the will to do it exists. Many of the changes proposed in the report would not cost a lot of money. I represent a constituency in inner London and, week-by-week, I receive letters from residents of all ages, but especially from youngsters and elderly people who speak of their concerns—often their fears—about the dangers that they face in the area where they live from vehicles that travel too fast. Often, the drivers of those vehicles have no concern whatever about the driving conditions in the area. That is something that all hon. Members will have seen in their constituencies.

The report spells out clearly, on pages 5 and 7, what excessive speed does. Page 5 states:

> "Death and serious injuries on our roads bring misery to hundreds of thousands, including the relatives and friends of the dead and injured . . . We have one of the worst child pedestrian safety records in Europe . . . Excessive and inappropriate speed is the largest single contributor to deaths and serious injuries on our roads and significantly reduces the quality of life in many urban and rural areas."

We know what is happening. We are also clear about the cause of deaths and injuries. Page 7 of the report says:

> "Every day, year in and year out, about 10 people are killed on our roads. In 2000, 3,409 people died, including 857 pedestrians . . . Many of these deaths and injuries are avoidable."

We are clear about the cost to our communities of excessive speed. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred in her speech to something that I find extremely sad. Many drivers, whatever vehicle they drive, do not fully understand what can happen to a pedestrian who is hit by a car. The report says:

> "Hit by a car at 40 mph, nine out of ten pedestrians will be killed. Hit by a car at 30 mph, about half of pedestrians will be killed. Hit by a car at 20 mph, nine out of ten pedestrians will survive."

Why is there not a greater Government campaign to make drivers more aware of what speed can do to pedestrians?

The report should be compulsory reading for anyone who is caught speeding and for people taking their driving test. It shows not only the dangers of speeding but the cost. On page 12 it states:

> "The cost of road accidents is very high. The DTLR estimated that the 'medical and ambulance costs attributed to road traffic accidents' was £540m in 2000 . . . The full cost to the nation of road traffic accidents is very large; a DTLR study has estimated it to be £17 billion in a single year."

Sadly, many drivers have no knowledge of the dangers. The report points out that:

> "many drivers do not know what the speed limits are . . . they do not regard speeding as a serious offence and they are unlikely to get caught . . . they do not appreciate the damage they do because others bear much of the cost".

What can we do? Indeed, what must we do? This excellent report highlights the issue. We must ensure that there is more effective enforcement. That could be introduced without any great cost. A much greater education campaign is needed. I realise that that could take longer, but a start must be made. We need to change people's attitude to driving at excessive speeds. As others have already said, nothing makes me check my speed more than the presence of traffic police. The report says that there has been a significant reduction in the number of traffic police. Is the authorities' attitude to that changing? If the Government are committed to reducing speed and the dangers that it presents, it surely cannot be right to reduce the numbers of police traffic patrol officers in the areas that we represent.

There is no doubt that what the driver of any type of vehicle most fears is disqualification. That is the real deterrent, not a fine. A fine may present problems, but people find the money. That is why I and, I am sure, the overwhelming majority of people, support a policy of disqualifying more drivers who are caught speeding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) made an important point about the attitude of the courts. Many aspects of law and order that come before the courts are debated in this House. I have spoken about several matters that have caused untold harm and

[Mr. Tom Cox]

disruption to my local community, but when the people responsible for the disruption appeared before the courts, the magistrates who heard the cases had no idea—even when they reached a guilty verdict—about the extent of the damage to the community. Equally, many courts and the magistrates who sit in them do not, when they hear cases of people driving at excessive speed, fully realise the dangers and problems that it causes.

The report demonstrates what can be achieved. It was interesting to read about comparisons between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, where many under-20 mph zones can be found, the total number of accidents has been reduced by 56 per cent.; accidents in which people have been killed or seriously injured by 90 per cent.; accidents involving child casualties by 64 per cent.; and pedestrian accidents by 54 per cent. That clearly shows the enormous benefits—for cities and rural areas alike—of tightly enforced speed limits.

We must educate motorists far more than we do now. The report states clearly how we could achieve that. We should

"establish a comprehensive, all-the-year-round publicity campaign . . . establish campaigns targeted at specific groups . . . make speed-related hazards a part of the hazard perception tests to be introduced in the driving test—*[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Dunwoody: The motorist is trying to fight back.

Mr. Cox: The report is excellent—*[Interruption.]*—and much work has gone into its preparation. All Members of Parliament hope—*[Interruption.]*—that in six months or a year's time, the report will not be forgotten. The report clearly shows—*[Interruption.]*—what speeding can and does do to so many people throughout the country. It also shows what could be done if the authorities, national or local, were truly committed to tackling the problem. That is the challenge faced by the Government and local authorities throughout the country. I hope that in the coming months, the right policies will be introduced and followed.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Before I call Mr. Brake, may I apologise for the false fire alarm. On behalf of the authorities of the House, I apologise profusely to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for the unnecessary interruptions to his speech.

3.19 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome this important debate, so ably initiated by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). In common with other Members, I am sorry to hear about certain people—Government Members—describing her as an old socialist. I shall not repeat the word that she used next.

Like the hon. Lady, I have encountered people who believe that their freedom to drive should not be constrained in any way. However, what they must realise is that a driver's free and fast-flowing traffic is a pedestrian's nightmare. Pedestrians end up taking their lives in their hands when they try to cross a road, especially in urban environments.

Did the hon. Lady notice the editorial in the *Evening Standard* a couple of days ago? Although that paper has run an aggressive campaign against congestion charges, the editorial was supportive of the need for measures to be introduced to slow traffic down. It agreed that statistics had established beyond doubt that speed kills, that too many people drive too fast and that we should slow down. The hon. Lady should be more confident about support for the type of measures recommended by the Transport Committee.

In research on traffic speed, Direct Line insurance found that more than half Britain's motorists favour speed limiter technology being fitted to all new cars on a compulsory basis, and 53 per cent. are in favour of limiters being fitted to all cars retrospectively. Hon. Members may be surprised at the level of support for such measures.

I disagreed with the hon. Lady about the effectiveness of covert versus overt speed cameras. As far as I am aware, no research has been carried out to establish which type is more effective. I suspect that research was not conducted on covert cameras before they were all painted yellow; so little comparison can be made.

To what should the Government respond in the Transport Committee report? First, the Government should be bold. The *Evening Standard* editorial that I mentioned was prompted by its front page, which referred to the shock cut in speed limits that the Government were apparently going to announce. I understand that the moment the front page came off the printing presses, the Department for Transport contacted news outlets to deny that there was any truth in the matter. That would concern me because the article seems to be picking up on the Transport Committee's recommendations and the Government's response.

The Government are supportive of the Committee's recommendations in relation to revised guidance for local speed limits. For example, recommendation O states:

"The Government should publish as a priority revised Guidance to local authorities on setting local speed limits".

The Government's response states:

"we propose to revise and publish new guidance in 2003."

In recommendation P, the Committee recommended specific guidance for local authorities on speed limits. In their response, the Government did not say that they disagreed with that recommendation. When the Government disagree with Select Committee recommendations, they say so. If the Government do not disagree, the *Evening Standard* editorial correctly picked up on what the Government were hinting at.

I am alarmed that the Government felt it necessary to deny so quickly that anything was in the pipeline. They should be bold. I have referred to the body of evidence from Direct Line insurance and to the *Evening Standard* editorial which suggest support for the measures, so there is no need for the Government's apparent timidity. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) rightly highlighted the need for action to be taken on rural roads. A one-size-fits-all speed limit for roads of different classification is illogical. A flat-rate

speed limit for motorways is equally unreasonable and illogical, and it is appropriate for the M25 to have variable limits.

We urgently need the rural road hierarchy that has been promised. Unfortunately, all that we are getting are plans for demonstration projects—there appears to be nothing concrete in the pipeline. I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to set out precisely the demonstration projects that the Government will support and to tell us in which parts of the country they will be.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I agree that we need variable speeds on rural roads. Does the hon. Gentleman think that there should be variable speeds through rural villages? There are villages in my constituency in which there is a 40 mph limit and there are those that are lucky to have a 30 mph limit, but there are 40 villages in East Sussex in which there is no speed limit whatsoever. Speed limits should not vary throughout rural communities. All villages want a limit of 30 mph or less.

Tom Brake: There are places in which variable speed limits might be appropriate, but it is equally clear that there are many villages, settlements and towns where it is appropriate to have a 30 mph zone that everyone understands and, we hope, respects. Several speed limits are dictated by weather conditions and so on and we should be more flexible. I hope that the Minister will set out the demonstration projects that the Government will support and the funding that will be available.

Several hon. Members referred to policing and enforcement. It is fortunate that I asked a question on 25 January about the number of mobile traffic units that operate radar guns in the Met police area. I received a response on 14 October. I did not think that that was a particularly speedy response as I had an eight-month wait for it, but I am pleased that it eventually arrived. The response reveals:

"The Metropolitan Police estimate that on any given day there are at least seven mobile hand-held speed detection devices for roadside use taken out in police patrol vehicles across London."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 469W.]

If the police say that there are at least seven devices, let us assume that there are a maximum of 10—I am sure that they would have used a larger number if that were appropriate. At a rough guess, if there are 4 million cars in London of which about 1 million are in use at any moment in time, the statistics suggest that people have a one in 100,000 chance of having their speed checked by a mobile hand-held speed detection device. In other words, people have a very small chance, if any at all, of being caught or checked by the police.

The information that the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety supplied to hon. Members for the debate highlighted a report by Claire Corbett of Brunel university. She has identified, as hon. Members know, that the way to stop people offending is to increase their chance of getting caught. There is very little chance of being caught, in London at least.

I would like the Minister to set out the Government's position on congestion charges. We had an interesting visit to Transport for London yesterday. Its representatives commented on the role that they expect congestion charges to play in reducing accidents. That is why I want a clear statement from the Government on whether they support congestion charges and, especially, the charges that will be introduced in London. There is confusion about the Government's position on congestion charges and whether they think that the charges will reduce accidents.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am afraid that you will not be aware that the Committee that I have the honour of chairing is about to start an inquiry into congestion charging. Part of the work that we did yesterday was a preliminary look at what is happening. Therefore, when the Minister begins his reply, I hope he will bear in mind the fact that we would like him to hear the evidence before he reaches a final conclusion—although he must have a view, of course.

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. She has discreetly wrapped my knuckles, but I am sure that the Minister will respond appropriately.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The hon. Gentleman says that the Government's policy on congestion charging is unclear. I refer him to what Lord McIntosh of Haringey said in the other place on Tuesday of this week:

"the Government have always been supportive of congestion charges and we have been supportive of the plans for congestion charges put forward by the Mayor of London. That matter was discussed with the Secretary of State on 26th September."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 October 2002; Vol. 639, c. 701.]

Therefore, although the Secretary of State was ducking and weaving on this issue yesterday, a senior Minister in the other place has confirmed what we have always believed to be true.

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He has correctly highlighted the fact that there are differences of opinion between Ministers on congestion charges, which are easy to focus on.

My final point is about joined-up thinking. This report identifies that a countrywide package of traffic-calming schemes could be introduced at a cost of £3 billion, and that that could result in the national health service saving about £100 million a week. I know that the Committee wants the Government to look at that package again. I hope that the Government will allow some joined-up thinking and action to take place by recognising the substantial savings—potentially £100 million a week—that could be derived from introducing those traffic-calming measures, and that they will therefore offset the expenditure against the savings that will be made elsewhere. If the Government were to do that, it would be a good example of joined-up thinking.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that many local authorities currently seem very reluctant to introduce 20 mph zones, even though they can do so? I am also concerned that, in my experience, the local police say that if there is not an enormous amount of capital expenditure they will not police such zones.

[Mrs. Annette L. Brooke]

Therefore, in my area at least, it has been impossible to have 20 mph zones outside several schools where we would like to have them.

Tom Brake: I thank my hon. Friend for that timely intervention. If the Government were to allow this joined-up thinking to operate, and if they recognised all the possible savings that could be made, they might be willing to assist local authorities to introduce the measures to which she has just referred, and which, on cost grounds, local authorities are probably not in a position to introduce at present.

The Transport Committee has clearly set out measures—many of which are very simple—that could greatly improve road safety. I urge the Government to be bold; they should implement these recommendations. With thousands of lives at stake, everything is to be gained.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the next speaker, I should point out that 10 hon. Members want to participate in this debate, and that they include the two Front-Bench spokesmen. Clearly, it is important that the Minister and the shadow Minister should have an opportunity to make positive contributions to this debate. Therefore, I ask all hon. Members to be as disciplined as possible in their remarks, so that everybody can have their say.

3.33 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I declare an interest. I am a co-chair of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, a charity that provides parliamentarians with research-based solutions to transport safety issues.

When I started reading the report, I was immediately struck by its trenchant language; it was biffing the Minister about the head. However, by the time I had reached the end of the report, I realised that the language was justified. The report is nothing less than a clarion call for action on behalf of all those who lose their lives, suffer ridiculously serious injuries or are bereaved when loved ones lose their lives on the roads. We should not wait a minute longer to take the action that we know needs to be taken to reduce the number of casualties.

In the light of those comments, the Government's response is disappointing. It does not address the seriousness of the issue or of the report itself, which deserves a much better response than the Government have given so far. I welcome the Government's support for the position of the Transport Research Laboratory, which sometimes receives unfair criticism for its reports of research findings. From all the research in this country and around the world, we can say that high average speeds and variability in speed lead to more crashes on the roads, and that a driver is six times as likely to be involved in a crash if he is travelling 25 per cent. faster than average speed. Our priority should clearly be to reduce the fastest speeds to achieve the greatest gain in road safety. As a rule of thumb, we can achieve a 5 per cent. reduction in crashes for every 1 mph reduction in average speeds.

I want to touch on the four themes of leadership, public support, resources and the future. In terms of leadership, the Prime Minister launched "Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone", which contains our casualty reduction targets for the next 10 years. The targets are challenging. They will require leadership and a consistent approach across the road safety lobby. However, we have seen several mixed messages from the Government so far.

Outside the subject of road traffic speed, we have seen the Government duck the issues of pedestrian protection and the reduction of the alcohol limit for drinking and driving. On road policing directly, last year saw the second round of local audits of the crime and disorder reduction local partnerships. I conducted a survey of every police force in the country, to ask them whether their audits had included requests to the public for their responses on road traffic policing. Only about half of them did so. Naturally, that reduces the opportunities for the public to say that they want road traffic policing to be a priority.

When I asked police forces why they had not consulted on the issue, I received responses such as that of one assistant chief constable who said:

> "It is my understanding that the priorities for Crime and Disorder strategies were felt to be more likely to be focused on crime and disorder rather than road safety, not least because road safety is being dealt with elsewhere."

A second force wrote that it had positively been advised by the relevant Government office that road traffic matters should not be included in the audit process. What sort of message is that to the country about the Government's determination and leadership in driving down road casualties?

Worse may be to come. The first national policing plan is due to be published at the end of November. The Home Office is now up to the 10th draft, and I understand that it contains not a single mention of road traffic policing. I hope that the Minister will make inquiries about that and have something to say about it to the Home Office if it is the case. The Government clearly have to get a grip and provide leadership, not least so that they do not let down all those dedicated individuals in councils, the police, health services and other organisations who are trying to reduce the number of casualties. The Government have to show leadership to the public and the commentators.

I come now to the issue of public support. Generally, the public would ask three questions about speed. First, what is the limit? They need to understand what the speed limit is for the road that they are on, which means that the Government have to say something about the national pattern of speed limits and the signing of them. The Committee made a simple and sensible suggestion about permitting repeater signs for 30 mph speed limits. The Government have responded disappointingly even to that basic recommendation.

Secondly, is the limit realistic? Drivers want to obey the law, but if they cannot see the sense of a speed limit and think that it is positively unreasonable, they will be hard pressed to obey the law even if they want to, unless, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich said, they are positively made to by a strong police presence. It is important to adopt a consistent approach to setting speed limits and to be able to justify them, so

that when drivers see a speed limit sign, they trust that the limit is reasonable. Then it is important to enforce limits consistently, so the third question is whether the limit will be enforced.

The first element in enforcing speed limits is signage, but there are other issues, such as engineering—whether we can use traffic-calming measures to make people keep to a certain speed limit—safety cameras and police officers. I have said enough about signage. Engineering is probably the simplest, cheapest and most effective way to reduce speed limits. We have had some success in Stafford, where the authority introduced 20 mph speed limits. We recently received a report on the first of those schemes after it had been operating for 18 months. A whole-estate approach was taken on the Highfields estate, and there was no rat running as a result of the traffic calming. In the five years before the implementation of the scheme there were 20 crashes resulting in serious or slight injury; fortunately, there were no fatalities. In the 18 months following the introduction of the scheme, there was just one crash causing slight injury—a dramatic improvement in safety achieved for a reasonable financial outlay.

Mr. Drew: I thank my hon. Friend for organising the PACTS briefing this morning, during which I was able to raise the issue of the safer city project in Gloucester. I shall be careful what I say, however, because the last time that I raised the issue I received more correspondence in the vein described by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) than I care to mention. That shows that we cannot take it as read that people understand why traffic calming is used and why we try to make drivers behave more responsibly. It is not always the natural speedsters who are critical. It is often those who are disabled or people who work for the ambulance service who seem to have a problem with some of the measures, so education must be part of the process, not a final add-on. Will my hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Kidney: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is important that we show leadership. Both as a Government and as politicians, we have a responsibility to explain why traffic calming is necessary in certain areas in our constituencies. It is important that we justify the measures and stand up to be counted. That is why I raised the subject of speed cameras.

We have received the first-year reports of those forces that have taken advantage of the netting-off scheme, which uses some of the income from speeding fines to pay for speed cameras. In those areas covered by the scheme, 47 per cent. fewer people were killed or seriously injured at camera sites. In the eight pilot areas, where the scheme has been running for longer, there has been an 18 per cent. reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured at camera sites.

Speed cameras are popular with the public. I differ slightly with the Committee in its criticism of the Minister's decision on the conspicuity of cameras. I believe that his decision is an example of good old-fashioned political nous, heading off possible criticism that the scheme is more about tax revenue than road safety, which would make it unpopular.

The presence of police officers is vital. In the summer, I spent a day of the recess on patrol with a police officer on the M6 motorway. In a commendable scheme, four police authorities have pooled their officers to police the motorways in a consistent way throughout the west midlands. The scheme shows how thinly resources are spread; with more resources, the police would be able to give a better service to the public who use the roads. That service would include not simply stopping people and punishing them but reducing casualties and congestion. There is a need for police officers to be physically present. That brings me on to resources generally, so I shall say no more about police forces.

Local authorities have received a welcome boost of Government finance for local transport plans. That is appreciated and is becoming noticeable on the ground. Through local transport plans, an integrated approach has been adopted, with an emphasis on public transport, walking, cycling and safety. Staffordshire, which has a casualty reduction partnership, has an impressive record. It took the lead with speed cameras in 1995 and there have been dramatic reductions in casualties on the roads. An estimated 250 people who would have been killed or seriously injured since 1995 are alive and walking about today because the presence of speed cameras reduced road speeds. They are good value for money, and it is a good amount of money. It is ironic that the problem that local authorities are encountering is skills shortages; there is a lack of the right sort of engineer to implement the measures for which they now have the money.

I said that I wanted to talk about the future. Mention has been made of intelligent speed adaptation. That refers to speed limiters, which can recognise the speed limit where a vehicle is and can consequently limit its speed. They are not new; they are used on heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles and some of the top ranges of motor car offer them as an optional extra, something attractive. I have been to the Motor Industry Research Association premises at Nuneaton and driven the second prototype intelligent speed adaptation car, which is being trialled. It drives like any other car and one does not notice any difference in performance except that it will not let one exceed the posted speed limit. It is a remarkable vehicle. I believe that it represents the future and could cut something like one quarter of deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

The next demonstration of the car for Members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords will be on 20 November at Brent Cross. Six parliamentarians are invited on that occasion. I am sure that if there is more interest, other demonstrations can be arranged. The next stage is a programme that will start in Leeds next year. Twenty vehicles with intelligent speed adaptation will be let loose on the roads of Leeds to see how they work on a bigger scale.

What we need to hear from the Minister is not that it will be left to the market to see how speed adaptation develops but that certain things will be done to ensure that it is a success. The most obvious is the digital mapping of speed limits. The Government should say now that they will provide the resources to make that happen, so that by the time that we are ready for the scheme to be national, the infrastructure is in place. The other little thing that the Government could do is to encourage some fleet operators to offer their fleets for larger trials of speed adaptation and give it the opportunity to prove itself.

[Mr. Kidney]

We need five things: a commitment across government, including in guidance on crime and disorder reduction partnership audits and in the national policing plan; to have all Government Departments signed up to the road safety agenda; a clear, consistent message, designed to make speeding as socially unacceptable as drinking and driving; clarity in speed limit policy; and best practice in education, engineering, enforcement and evaluation. Most of all, we need leadership from the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, let me give the House more specific guidance. A number of people still want to speak. I have no authority to demand this, but I should be very grateful if Back Benchers would limit their remarks to 10 minutes. That will give the Front Benchers full opportunity to participate.

3.48 pm

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): I am mindful of your words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and shall endeavour to conclude in much less than 10 minutes.

I pay tribute to the Chairman, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), for her terrific introductory speech and to all the Committee for having produced this excellent report. I am particularly glad that in introducing the subject the Chairman showed such passion and vigour. We should all be passionate about the subject, because it is a matter of life and death. I have particular reason to understand that because, early in September, my teenage nephew was knocked down on a road on the way to school. But for the incredible professionalism and dedication of the East Sussex ambulance service and then the intensive care team of doctors and nurses at the Royal Sussex county hospital, he would not be alive today. Although he remains in hospital, I am glad to say that it looks as though he will make a full recovery.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) spoke about the impact that the different speeds of 20 mph, 30 mph and 40 mph can have on the survival rates of those involved in traffic accidents. The points that he made were spot on. They must not be lost amid arguments about expenditure, budgeting and inconvenience to drivers. We must think of the casualties first and last.

I want to articulate the feelings of those in many rural areas, especially in my constituency. People there feel that their areas are blithely given a mandatory 40 mph speed limit, when so many towns and urban areas will as a matter of course be given a 30 mph or even 20 mph speed limit. East Sussex county council is currently undertaking a village speed limit review. In the county, 41 villages have been identified that have no speed limit at all. The council is in the process of identifying the right level of speed limit to be imposed. It thinks that the limit might be 30 mph, but in some cases it might be 40 mph, depending on the investigations into current speed.

I believe passionately that all communities, rural or urban, should as a matter of right be able to put a 30 mph speed limit through the centre of their communities. In my village of Peasmarsh and the neighbouring village of Beckley, there is a 40 mph speed limit that takes one straight past the school in Beckley and the village shop in Peasmarsh. It runs past the memorial centre, and there is not even a proper crossing. Elsewhere in my constituency, whether in Catsfield, Herstmonceux, Boreham Street, Bodiam—I could go on much longer—people are desperate to slow down the traffic that runs through the heart of their communities.

East Sussex county council has a prioritised action list of 140 villages identified as in need of traffic calming, but the budgetary restrictions on the council mean that only between four and six of those calming measures can be carried out each year. Even if no further scheme is identified, that means that it will take at least 20 years before all those schemes are implemented. Then and only then can the council begin to think about a mandatory 30 mph limit in all villages. That is clearly totally unacceptable. I want the Government not only to empower local authorities so that they take can action in theory, but to deliver the resources so that they can take it in practice.

Two points occurred to me during the debate. The first is about driver habits and technology. This year, I have bought a more high-performance car, which is capable of faster speeds. In fact, the impact on my driving behaviour has been to lower my speeds, especially in built-up areas, because that sporty car has a digital display in the dashboard that tells me my speed. It has a much more direct impact on my driving than the old-fashioned needle dial. I can see instantly when it flicks above 30 mph. I am aware that the speed indicator is vague on many cars. New technology has a role to play in confronting drivers with their speed.

The second point is about taking a delegation of my constituents last year to Poundbury in Dorset to look at the development there. I was struck by how town planning in the building of that new community had reduced the role of the car. There is no proliferation of signage, but the design of roads has made them safer for pedestrians. All too often in villages or housing estates, there are broad, sweeping roads with wide corners and clear views, which just give a clear indication to a driver to put his foot down. It certainly does in my village, Peasmarsh. In Poundbury, however, blind corners have been built deliberately so it is impossible for drivers to get up any speed at all before they have to brake, halt and turn. Town planning has an important part to play in preventing future accidents.

I know that the Minister is a decent man and will aspire to implement many of the recommendations in this excellent report, but it is no good willing the end if one does not will the means. I would like him directly to address what he is going to do to ensure that the recommendations in the report are actually implemented, on a time scale that will be meaningful to people who have young children now, and who do not want to wait until they have grown up and left school before their roads are made safer. What will he do to ensure that a fraction of a vast Government budget of £418 billion will be diverted to saving the lives of our children?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I hope it is appropriate to intervene, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just in case there is not time later on to cover the point. The hon. Gentleman will know that most of the safety plans

throughout the country are delivered by local authorities and through the moneys that we put into local transport plans. As has been pointed out, those have been substantially increased in the past two years: one of the members of the Committee says twofold, but I would say they have increased threefold in the last two years. Those are moneys for local councils to take decisions. Will the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) commit a future Conservative Government to those levels of spending on local transport plans?

Gregory Barker: Sadly, I am only a lowly Back Bencher, so I cannot commit a future Conservative Government to anything. A very senior Member sits alongside me, but I have a feeling that he will keep mum. I take on board the Minister's words about the funding of the transport plan. Can I, therefore, have an assurance from him that he will intervene, and contact the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure that the threatened cut of up to £44 million in the funding for East Sussex county council is not implemented? Some £44 million stands to come out of the budget of East Sussex county council.

The Government have vast resources available. They have to wrestle with priorities, but I cannot think of a higher priority than saving the lives of children, elderly people, and the thousands of people who die unnecessarily in car accidents every year.

3.57 pm

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): As local authorities, the highways agency and car manufacturers grapple with technological advance, and as the police deal with increasing demands on their time, this grim report has come as a timely reminder to us all that inappropriate speed is one of Britain's biggest killers. We are all trying to achieve, through the initiatives that we have talked about today, a culture shift in driver habits similar to that concerning drink driving in the 1970s and 1980s. I welcome the report's assertion that we should have an evidence-led speed management policy. I was particularly pleased to see that the recommendations of the British Medical Association were adopted in paragraph 15. It now seems that health statistics will be built into the database of accident spots.

Has the Minister considered whether the insurance industry could play a role in establishing an accurate picture of where road traffic accidents occur in Britain? Every time I look at my insurance policy bill, it is always a reminder to me that the industry is aware of every last penny that is spent on road traffic accidents in Britain.

The emphasis in the document on reducing risk is important. The £10 million that the Government are about to spend on the pilot network of pedestrian training schemes, particularly in deprived areas, should be welcomed. At the risk of derision from everyone in the room, I have to say that I am a member of the Tufty club generation, and we have to bring up a new generation of young people who have road safety at the heart of their education.

Paragraph 30 of the report, which recommends an increase in dedicated cycle routes, is timely. In a letter, my neighbouring Member of Parliament, the Minister for Transport, told me that he had doubled the funding for dedicated cycle routes. That may have been partly in fear of the Chairman of the Transport Committee and partly because he is a committed cyclist. I was tantalised by the announcement from the Department for Transport, which said that my constituency, West Bromwich, East, was to be the recipient of some of the additional money. Imagine my disappointment when I realised that it had the column wrong, and it was the constituency of Madam Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (Sylvia Heal), which was receiving a grant for a primary care trust to do cycle education training. You cannot win everything; we may have better luck next time.

People know that speed kills, but I am not sure whether they appreciate when they are the wheel of a vehicle what different speeds do. I wonder whether the Department for Education and Skills has a role to play in that respect. For instance, the national curriculum might use the speeds of vehicles when practical examples are required in maths training. Although the information is built into the highway code test, young people are schooled to pass the test rather than to make the correct risk assessment when they are driving. There is no Education Minister present today, but I want us to make progress in that respect.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that many young people are allowed to take their cycling proficiency test in school? Lots of American high schools organise driving tests, which the students take in school. What does the hon. Gentleman think of that idea?

Mr. Watson: It is an excellent idea, which we could explore in future debates.

The report focused on particular types of drivers who are most vulnerable to speeding, and I want to focus on the commercial sector. The role of business in accident prevention is often overlooked. Accidents caused by speeding company cars and other working vehicles claim an incredible number of lives each year, and the figures are on the increase. More than 1,100 people die every year in work-related road accidents in company cars or commercial vehicles. Statistically, company car drivers are the worst motorists—last year, almost a third were involved in an accident—and they are significantly more likely to have been involved in a road accident than any other group. For a variety of reasons, company car drivers tend to be less responsible than other drivers. Three quarters of them make telephone calls while in their cars. More worryingly, 16 per cent. admit that they are always under pressure from their bosses to drive to ever-increasing deadlines. No matter how good the speed management of a road, drivers who feel pressurised to speed will continue to do so. The only thing that will change that is a serious call in the workplace to change the way in which businesses treat their drivers, but companies would sooner keep their costs down and increase their short-term productivity by encouraging employees to drive inappropriately fast.

Fortunately, in the long term, statistics can demonstrate financial incentives for companies to change their car-driving policies. The average cost of repairing a company car is £750; a van repair costs nearly £1,400 and a commercial vehicle £4,500. Those figures do not include the cost of lost productivity of an employee taken out of the work environment.

[Mr. Watson]

There is an incentive for companies to introduce risk assessment schemes, but when only one in five commercial drivers and company car drivers receive risk assessment, it is no surprise that the TUC has today called for the Health and Safety Executive to put pressure on companies to give adequate risk assessment training to their employees.

There is a lot more I would like to have said on this matter, but in deference to my colleagues who have not spoken I shall close this part of my speech. I want to mention briefly the engineering involved in road traffic management. It has been said that traffic-calming solutions are often simple, but I wonder whether the pool of expertise in traffic calming on which local authorities can draw is being used appropriately in areas where there are unusual roads.

One of my constituents, a retired police sergeant, Mr. Leonard Phillips, wrote to me recently about the Newton road in my constituency, which has a difficult junction and a blind bend on an incline, and is currently a 40 mph road. After 20 years of savage accidents and in spite of three speed cameras, a speed-checking warning camera and numerous traffic signs, we still have not got the engineering right to reduce the number of road traffic accidents. My personal view is that we should simply lower the speed limit. Council engineers inform me that there would be other safety hazards if they were to introduce traffic lights.

I wonder whether the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions could have a pool of experts to provide a best practice guide for local authority engineers. I also wonder whether there are disparities in road traffic safety budgets between local authorities. If my own borough of Sandwell were to receive an increase, we might be able to get a long awaited zebra crossing on the Hamstead road, which causes many of my constituents great concern.

A mild criticism of the report is that paragraphs 60 and 61 on the siting and colour of speed cameras were a little harsh. It seems logical that we should put speed cameras at the most appropriate places on roads and that we should target accident black spots first. As I said at the start of my speech, if we want to achieve a culture change in Britain, we must take public opinion with us. Motorists and the public alike have a genuine fear that if we allow unfettered use of safety cameras, we will simply have a forest of safety cameras that are used to generate revenue rather than to increase safety. However, I understand my colleagues' concern that the colour yellow might give prior warning to speeding drivers.

I end my remarks here so that everyone can speak this afternoon.

4.7 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I shall be brief, as many of the things that I would have said have been said already in hon. Members' fine speeches.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who spoke brilliantly. She produced a splendid report that I, like others, support.

I will address my remarks primarily to my hon. Friend the Minister and his ministerial colleagues, as there are historic precedents for changes in the law governing driving and motoring that we should bear in mind. In the past, we delayed introducing measures that have since saved thousands of lives, and people died in the mean time as a result. Delay is deadly, and I hope that the Government will take the bull by the horns and act quickly so that many lives are saved.

The introduction of the law on crash helmets is an example. I do many things in my constituency. I am a patron of the local acquired brain injury group, several members of which had crashes on motorcycles before crash helmets were required and were damaged for life. Of course, many others died. After that, we had the issue of seat belts. I was one of the people who bought seat belts for my car, fitted and wore them. I was mocked by some of my more macho friends who thought that it was a little feeble and that I should be bold and drive fast. We all know that culture. I told them that I wanted to live. I studied engineering and applied mathematics when I was younger, so I know about the laws of motion and the forces of deceleration. We know what happens to a tomato when it is dropped from a first-floor window on to a concrete pavement. I think of that when I think of the human body hitting a solid object. We must think in those terms. The human body is frail, soft and easily damaged. I have often said that if one walks along the pavement into a lamp post at 4 mph, one can do serious damage to one's head. Imagine the impact at 40 mph. A little understanding of engineering and science helps in these matters.

Two of my dear friends in my youth died in car accidents. They might not have died had they worn seat belts. As soon as seat belts were introduced, people immediately adapted to them and there was no problem. However, there was a serious problem about wearing seat belts in other people's cars. I used to wear a seat belt in other people's cars and was chastised by my friends, who felt that I was accusing them of being bad drivers. I used to reply, "No, it's not you; it's the youngster who tears round the corner and crashes into you." At that point, they would make some unparliamentary remark about my cleverness, but I shall leave that on one side.

Every year that we delayed implementing the compulsory wearing of seat belts, 300 people died on the roads and many thousands more were seriously injured. Simply by implementing the compulsory wearing of belts, which did not cost much, we have saved tens of thousands of lives. Therefore, acting quickly now that the evidence is before the Government is vital.

A local police officer has made representations to me that, whatever we do in technology terms, we must also have the personnel to police it. Technology is not a perfect substitute for police officers in the traffic division. We need traffic police as well as technology to ensure that the law is enforced.

Tom Brake: I raised the issue of speed cameras and hand-held devices with my local police force, which said that it took four officers to use them: two at the point where they used the gun, and two at the point where they tried to stop the driver, in case there was an altercation. That means that 25 per cent. of the police in the London borough of Sutton are taken off street patrolling to use the hand-held device, so I agree that resources are key to the issue.

Mr. Hopkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention.

I repeat that the Government must act and should not be nervous about challenging the remnants of the macho culture to which I referred. It is diminishing; people are becoming more sensible and the culture is changing. There was a time when the motorist was such a fearsome beast who would vote against any Government who dared to impose restrictions on driving that every Government trembled every time they challenged him. However, that is not the case now. Families with children, elderly people and the great majority of motorists know that the restrictions are sensible. Therefore, the Government have nothing to fear from public opinion by acting quickly and strongly to reduce death on the road.

4.12 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), the Chairman of the Select Committee, and the rest of the Committee on producing an excellent report, not least because of the wealth of information that it brings together. The wealth of detail that it provides fully justifies, if anyone needed further justification, radical measures to tackle the menace of speeding on our roads.

I endorse in the strongest terms possible the Select Committee's call for the urgent and radical action that is required to effect a dramatic reduction in the numbers killed and injured on our roads. I, too, welcome what the Government have done so far. In my city, thanks to funding from the Scottish Executive, 11 20-mph zones are in operation, and another 20 are in the pipeline.

However, I share some of the disappointment expressed by some hon. Members that more has not yet been done to take the Government's safety strategy further forward. We seem to be caught in a world of feasibility studies, demonstration projects and pilot studies; a more comprehensive approach is needed on implementation. I know that there are demands on civil service time and the Government have limited time to introduce legislation, but it was a pity that, after the end of a consultation on road traffic penalties, the Government took almost a year and a half to come up with a response. It is a little concerning that the response does not say when we might see in legislation some of the required changes. I hope that the Minister will say today when we will see some of the changes recommended in the review.

The problem with a delay in making legislative proposals is that it can give the wrong message and suggest that we are not taking the issue as seriously as others. We must make it clear by legislation and effective enforcement that when we say we want to change attitudes we mean it. The most effective way to change attitudes is to underline it with effective enforcement and powerful legislation.

I urge on the Government early implementation of the recommendations of the road traffic penalties review, particularly regarding two-tier penalties for speeding to make the consequences of speeding over a certain limit even more serious. I support the Select Committee's recommendation about the decision to paint speed cameras yellow and to impose restrictions on where they can be sited. It was a mistake, not just because of the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich gave earlier, but because it risks sending out the message that catching speeding motorists too effectively is somehow unfair and that a little bit of speeding is okay. We must challenge and change that. I hope that the Government will reconsider the guidance that they have issued on speed cameras.

Mr. Kidney: I mentioned earlier that we have had cameras in Staffordshire since 1995. The police have had no problem with painting them yellow, giving notice about where they are and choosing where to put them. They even put the locations on the internet. None of that has damaged their ability to reduce accidents involving fatalities and serious injuries. Is my hon. Friend making too much of a meal of this point?

Mr. Lazarowicz: I respect what my hon. Friend says, but there is little indication either way of the effects of different approaches to speed camera positioning. I accept that in some cases advance warning about speed cameras can encourage speed reduction but—this point is made in the report—it is dangerous to give the message that it is only at those points that one might be caught for speeding. In Scotland, where the matter is devolved, our cameras are still grey. It would be interesting to see a comparison between the effect on policy in Scotland and England.

Speed cameras are an important method of tackling this problem precisely because installing them is now self-financing. Although some of the measures suggested by the Select Committee to tackle speeding are expensive and we should not shy away from spending, many would not require large sums of money, or much legislative time. On the national speed limit for instance, I find it hard to understand how we allow vehicles to be driven up to 60 mph on so many country lanes and minor roads. Like most hon. Members, I am old enough to remember the time when the national speed limit was 50 mph. The current limit was put in place simply by an order. A one-paragraph order could bring it down to 50 mph again. It would not require Second and Third Readings and Committee stages in both Houses. It could be dealt with very easily and speedily.

We do not need legislation to encourage the police and the prosecution authorities to ensure that they enforce the existing speed limits rather than allow, as they still do in too many places, a 10 mph leeway. Let us spend more money on street safety schemes. Let us also make it easier to put speed reduction schemes such as 20 mph zones in place. I agree with the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) that we must make it legislatively possible for 20 mph zones to be put in place. In my city of Edinburgh, the council tried to operate the schemes and found that carrying out the physical work required by the guidance could be a major task that might inhibit full implementation. The council wants to introduce a 20 mph scheme in Edinburgh's new town in my constituency, but the guidance requires entry points into a 20 mph zone from a 30 mph zone to be marked with physical entry features, not just by signs. As hon. Members will know, the new town is a world heritage site, so it is not a matter of laying down cheap concrete. The entry points must be high quality and prestigious

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architecturally. The council estimated that it would cost £500,000 to introduce a 20 mph zone in an area of only one square mile. Ideally, the default speed limit in urban areas might be 20 mph. It would be easier to declare 20 mph zones in larger areas within towns and cities, which would reduce costs dramatically and help to put speed limit schemes into effect more quickly.

Perhaps because I have young children, I feel strongly about this issue. Having children made me much more aware of our severe accident record for children in comparison with our generally good accident record compared with the rest of Europe. I want to tell the Minister that I am not alone in feeling so strongly about the issue. The attendance of hon. Members at today's debate suggests the strength of feeling on the matter. I have never heard anyone at my surgery complaining about speed limits or speed cameras. Rather, people come to see me time and again demanding action to control speed limits and stop traffic speeding through their streets. Constituents want more 20 mph limits and more home zones—and they want them now. They want speed limits enforced, not ignored. I am sure that the Minister appreciates that, and I ask the Government to build on what they have already achieved with more action, more quickly.

4.22 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I shall be brief. As always at this stage of the debate, it has all been said. I shall not elaborate on points that have already been made, but I want to respond to a couple of issues that have not been fully covered.

I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) in stressing the extent to which the planning system can cause problems when traffic calming measures are put in place. If I were not present here today, I would be attending a presentation on traffic calming. The area where I live has been fortunate in getting its humps taken out: it is a cul de sac, so the humps did not seem an effective use of funds. For the rest of the estate, however, we are seriously considering putting traffic calming measures in place. Why getting that done has taken so long is partly a question of money. When the process started, the funding did not seem too great, but it turned out that an inordinate amount was involved. Is there enough flexibility in the system for people to have limited but effective traffic calming in their areas?

Returning to this morning's briefing, it was interesting to hear about behavioural changes in drivers rather than physical barriers alone. It may not be cheap, but if physical barriers can be used to make people think harder about how they are driving, it could be a way forward.

I have had previous dealings as a councillor. I am still a parish councillor, as I always tell people, so I have a vested interest because I shall be putting the measure forward and we will ask for a contribution. The planning system involves delay and, in the past, I have visited people with objections to try to persuade them to remove them. I have had some success with that. It is not often that a politician claims success for something that he has done directly, although maybe he does claim success for things that he has not done.

The way in which a small group of people—sometimes business men with vested interests—can create effective opposition, despite the fact that the vast majority of people want traffic calming, should be examined. I know that that is not the Minister's direct responsibility, but I hope that, if and when we get planning changes, the rule will be examined through negotiation and liaison with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to try to make the desired changes more rapid. Most people want to slow down vehicles and they want action sooner rather than later.

My next point has been alluded to several times in the past, but I shall make it a direct challenge to the Minister. I cannot understand why we are shilly-shallying around by not banning people from using mobile phones while driving. I speak as a cyclist, which is why I am here today. I ride my bike around Stroud, which is why I am much fitter than I used to be. There is one thing that I find galling and that puts me in more peril than anything else. In my experience, nine out of 10 motorists are very good with regard to cyclists, but one out of 10 puts the safety of a cyclist in the lap of the gods. If that one out of 10 is using a mobile phone, the cyclist prays. Those motorists pay no attention whatsoever.

Mr. Hopkins *rose—*

Mr. Drew: I have obviously started something here. I certainly give way.

Mr. Hopkins: I wonder how my hon. Friend would deal with several of the motorists in my constituency who use mobile phones but have darkened windows in their cars so that one cannot see them using the phones.

Mr. Drew: There is always somebody who can come up with a worse experience.

I do not know why we cannot ban people from using the damn things. People do not need to use a hand-held mobile phone while driving, although the Minister will probably find a reason why. I know that there was a private Member's Bill relating to this, but I hope that we can get on with doing something.

Mr. Jamieson *rose—*

Mr. Drew: We will get the answer now.

Mr. Jamieson: Just in case we do not have time to cover this point at the end, my hon. Friend might have noticed that we put out a consultation during the summer with a view to introducing legislation that would ban such use of hand-held mobile phones.

Mr. Drew: I am pleased. I am always in favour of consultation, but sometimes we want action.

I draw a parallel with what we did about drink driving. Evidence showing that we reduced incidents by two thirds demonstrates that if we provide the leadership about which my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) spoke, we can change cultures. It is not easy, but it does happen over time.

I have already intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), so I shall say briefly that the report is good and gives us much to work with.

I must be careful about what I say about the safer city initiative because it does not extend to my constituency. I shall expand a point that I have made previously. A lot of work must be done to persuade people that holistic changes matter in addition to individual aspects such as traffic calming or the changes to driving behaviour that are encouraged. That requires time, effort and money. The initiative has obviously worked, but no doubt I will receive much criticism from Gloucester citizens for saying that and I will be told to keep my nose out of it. However, I occasionally ride through Gloucester—we do not yet have private estates in terms of cities.

Hon. Members mentioned problems in rural areas. Displacement is the largest current problem caused by congestion. That is the problem that I have with congestion charges, because we must understand where motorists are likely to go. They are likely to use cut-throughs in rural areas. The standard of driving is that of the one in 10 motorists to whom I referred. They drive like a bat out of hell because, if they have been caught up in congested areas of cities, they try to make up time by driving very fast on rural roads. The situation requires enforcement rather than believing that just changing speed limits will make a difference. Many of our villages do not have pavements and people have to rely on walking or cycling to cover short distances—although not sufficiently, in my opinion. If we are to encourage that, we must reduce the speed of traffic. That is achievable. It involves making general changes to speed limits, and the use of repeater signals, so that we can make it clear what speed people should be driving at. I accept that saying, "We did not know that this was a limited area," is an excuse. I hope that those things will happen.

The Government have a big agenda to address, and the Select Committee has done us a favour by setting that big agenda and taking it forward. I hope that all of us—the hon. Members who are present and the people who have come to listen to the debate—agree that this is an incredibly important issue.

I recently received a letter asking why I do not believe in the death penalty, as there are so many child killers out there. My response to that is always, "Well, there are other child killers who—maybe—we do not take seriously enough, and they happen to be people who drive cars." I do not want to use emotive language, but we could do something about that. It would lead to a genuine bonus because many more children would live, due to the changes that we would introduce.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the next speaker, I want to say that we are on target, so I hope to call the three remaining speakers before the winding-up speeches.

4.31 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I welcome the report—although perhaps not quite as much as other hon. Members, judging by the tone of the debate. I agree that speed is a problem when it is excessive or inappropriate—those terms are often used interchangeably.

I am a motorist, and I am conscious of the extraordinary improvements in my life that a fairly fast method of conveyance has made possible. I am the Member of Parliament for Hemel Hempstead. In the past, the Member of Parliament for that constituency would not have been able to see his children every morning, but I can do that, thanks to a motor vehicle. After I get the train, I am able to convey myself across the Hertfordshire countryside so that I can take my children to school most mornings when I do not have very early meetings.

Motoring is life-enhancing and enjoyable. I speak as an ex-long-distance lorry driver. I have taken motor cycles over most of the countries of Europe. I have driven a sports car for many thousands of miles. Motoring has been one of the pleasures of my life. The fact that it gets you from A to B faster than a horse and cart or a paddle boat is an integral part of that enjoyment. Motoring extends our horizons and it gives us opportunities that we would not have if we did not have motor vehicles. I therefore do not want to start by condemning speed as such.

I do condemn two things, the first of which is excessive speed, which I define—as did the old highway code—as travelling at a speed at which you cannot stop in the distance you see to be clear. That seems to me to be the most fundamental problem. Accidents are often not caused by the straight-line speed of a vehicle, although I do not deny that sometimes—say, when a crash is caused by a blow out—the straight-line speed of the vehicle might make the resulting injuries more serious than they would otherwise have been. However, for the most part, travelling at excessive speed is not the problem. One must drive one's vehicle not in such a way that one avoids hitting people at 10 mph rather than at 30 mph, but in such a way that one avoids hitting people at all.

In the motoring world, a sense grew that motoring was so enjoyable that roads were entirely for motorists, so I welcome the part of the report that points out, as we did in a debate in Westminster Hall 15 months ago, that roads are meant to be shared by lots of different users. We have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) about his cycling. Many people other than motorists are road users—cyclists, horse-riders, pedestrians and children playing.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. McWalter: In a moment.

We should understand that ownership of our roads is shared—there is a varied set of stakeholders. That creates different characteristics, and people should fulfil their obligations depending on the character of road that they are traversing. There is utter confusion at the moment. I know of a road so full of different colours, markings and scratchings that nobody has a clue what they mean—the markings are supposed to take the place of a pedestrian crossing, which would be more expensive. People did slow down for about the first three days after they appeared, and promptly resumed their speed when they realised that the markings did not mean very much.

I would have liked something about road markings to have appeared in the report. One of the most fundamental and brilliant road markings in British

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motoring history is the speed limit that, in effect, says, "You must go at no miles per hour." It involves painting the road black and white and adding a flashing orange light. It says, "If there is somebody in the vicinity of the entrance to this piece of road, you have no priority and you must stop." It is one of the most brilliant pieces of road safety provision. Now we have a complete mess, which was not sorted out by the debate 15 months ago, and I welcome the opportunity to begin to sort it out. However, that will not happen if we fail to distinguish between excessive speed and speed as such.

I have been fighting tooth and nail in my constituency to get 20 mph limits, so I am pleased to hear that some hon. Members have achieved them. As the report says, in a couple of my villages—Nettledon and Water End—cars whistle through at such a rate that it is impossible for someone sensibly to visit a neighbour living on the opposite side of the road. There is a 30 mph limit—East Sussex will be envious of that—but nobody respects it and it is never policed. In any case, the road is a rat run and the limit is never protected. I do not merely want a 20 mph limit: I want that limit to be policed.

I welcome what the report says about rural roads, where I want a 40 mph limit to be introduced. I said that I enjoy motoring, but I do not enjoy motoring on roads that only have passing places where vehicles are hurtling at me at 60 mph. If I am doing 30 mph, an impact with a another vehicle travelling at 60 mph would be a 90 mph impact, and one or the other, if not both, of the drivers would perish, unless I am quick enough to get out of his way—it nearly always is a "he".

The report is right to urge a 40 mph limit, but it must be policed. However, limits are never policed and where there are clear limits, people will continue not to honour them. Where are all the traffic police? They are on the only roads that are not meant for shared use—motorways. There should be no pedestrians or learner drivers on motorways: they are intended for motorists. It is interesting that the "Toad of Toad Hall" fixation, in which the only people who matter are motorists, extends to policing. If policing traffic is about protecting horse-riders, cyclists, pedestrians and children at play, traffic police should be where those people need to be protected. We have failed utterly to do that.

The fixation with motorway limits is a fixation about the death of motorists, but people are 10 times more likely to perish on a rural road or a council estate road than on a motorway. Because of the fixation with speed, the report appears to be opposed to the idea that cars and motor cycles allow us to do things that we could not otherwise do. I know that the Committee vote must have been fairly close on the matter. As I urged the Minister in the previous debate, there is no reason why motorists should be limited to 70 mph on roads that are entirely for motorists.

I spent most of the summer doing 80 mph on French roads—the limit is 81 mph. That is not especially dangerous, although it becomes dangerous when someone approaches from behind at 130 mph with the intention of blowing the other driver off the road. That is dangerous and causes accidents, and in two weeks in France it happened to me more often than it happens to me for the other 50 weeks of the year in Britain, because our driving codes are a great deal better than theirs. Of course, it still happens in Britain, but has anyone ever heard of someone being prosecuted for travelling too near another driver at an unreasonable speed? I never have. What happens is that people are prosecuted for the straight-line speed that they are doing, even if they have temporarily speeded up to 90 mph to get out of the way of a car that is travelling at 130 mph. Both drivers are penalised in that situation. We should try to arrive at an understanding of speeding whereby we prosecute "hurtling", as I called it in the previous debate. That means prosecuting people who travel at a speed at which they cannot stop within the distance they see to be clear.

We have to establish a sense of shared ownership of most of our road system, and the report goes a long way towards doing that. We should give local authorities the opportunity of creating not only 20 mph zones but 5 mph zones in places where children play. We should not conduct the debate in such a way that we think entirely about speed, rather than excessive speed. It is time that we recognise that motoring brings tremendous benefits and value to people in terms of family life and other things. If we can get the balance right, we should accept the report and even entrench it, but we should ensure that the traffic activity is conducted away from motorways. Let the motorways be policed by cameras, but we should also allow higher speeds on motorways to ensure the journey times that people now expect without the dangers that currently oppress them.

4.42 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I welcome the Select Committee report and the opportunity to take part in the debate. I must own up to the fact that in a previous life I worked in the transport and planning department of the Greater London Council and oversaw some project administration in west London. Some of my babies are still out there. Today, I shall focus on my constituency and its experience in dealing with road traffic management. I shall cite cases of constituents of mine, some of whom have been tragically affected when speeding has caused the death of a loved one.

One hon. Member said earlier that more pedestrian crossings were needed. I do not know if it is the case today and I do not claim to be an expert, but when I worked in transport and planning, the experts' argument was that there were more accidents at pedestrian crossings than elsewhere. That is an easy answer. If a slower speed limit is not imposed on the approach to pedestrian crossings, people may be doing 30 or 40 mph when they come up to the crossings. Pedestrians often have a false sense of security when they walk on to the crossing, thinking that cars are going to slow down.

That is the heart of the debate. An holistic approach is needed to the problem. It is not just that we need to reduce speeds—we must also consider the nature of the community in which the car is travelling and whether we make it easier for the car. Should the road and the built environment be dominated by the motorist's needs or by the needs of the community and pedestrians? I shall elaborate on that later.

The Government should be congratulated on their efforts to encourage speed reduction, as well as on tackling issues such as home zones and urban planning.

We should not regard roads as separate from the residential areas where we live, or the places where we shop or work. Some of the problems are caused by the officers in charge locally who advise councillors. If they do not agree with communities who want lower speed limits, they can produce dozens of reasons why those lower limits should not be introduced, such as not enough people are being killed or maimed; people will not obey a reduced speed limit; or the route is part of a major road.

Like many Members present, I represent a mining constituency. It includes urbanised areas as well as villages in the countryside. There are many A-roads where the speed limit changes from 60 to 40 mph, and there is no effort to reduce the speed limit when the road goes through a small village. One such area is Austerfield, which I shall mention again.

There is a real problem with changing the mindset of people who have operated in a pro-car, pro-road culture for many years. Many councillors in Doncaster—certainly the cabinet member responsible for the matter, councillor John Hoare—are engaged in trying to consider the community's needs, which are not merely based on statistics that determine that a certain number of accidents or deaths must take place before speed reduction can be considered. I urge the Government in their guidelines to local authorities and through the Local Government Association to ensure that the voices of communities that demand lower speed limits are heard, not simply dismissed if they do not fit in with the technicalities of calculating the statistics on road deaths.

Austerfield is on an A-road, and people wanted to reduce the speed limit from 40 to 30 mph. It took two years for them to obtain an order, and I am pleased to say that the notice has now been put up on a lamppost. I do not want to be too partisan, but two Conservative councillors went along with the recommendations from officers that the speed limit should not be reduced. That is a classic example of councillors listening to the experts rather than to the local community and not feeling able to counter the experts' arguments.

In that case, we successfully opposed the recommendations, but there are many other communities in which the people want to reduce speed limits. In Warmsworth, residents raised a petition for a 20 mph zone, but were told that it would not be possible to implement it before 2004. Auckley parish council wanted to introduce a 20 mph zone outside three local schools and has been specific about which areas it wants to target, but it has been told that the issue is low priority. There is a problem with the mindset of some highway officers who are unresponsive to public demands.

Resources have also been mentioned, but so many issues have been raised today that a bottomless pit could be required to take them all. It is often argued that road safety measures cost too much. As I have seen when I have gone in to do battle with highway officers, they sometimes provide so much for one particular area—chicanes, road bumps, signs, road markings—that traffic-calming measures can be introduced only in a few other areas.

I am not an expert in the matter but, as a layperson, I question why it is necessary to overload one stretch of road with so many different types of traffic-calming measures to achieve a result. As a driver, and as one who has listened to constituents who live in areas where such schemes have been introduced, I have found that the flashing sign is one of the most effective measures. If a sign starts flashing when a driver approaches a village, it has a huge psychological impact. More is not necessarily best. If a measure is effective, and if it would allow us to cover more areas, so be it. It is not good enough to deny some communities a simple flashing sign on the basis that millions of pounds have been spent on one or two stretches of road in Doncaster.

Also on the subject of resources, we should look laterally at the other pots of money from which the Government provide funding. Some hon. Members say that such money is not allocated to their constituencies but we in Doncaster have neighbourhood renewal money and new deal for communities money. Some of that money can be used to examine the built environment to make it safer for people and to improve the quality of their communities and homes. If the way in which traffic and the road environment has an impact on the home environment is not examined, it should be. If the money were used, that would relieve pressure on the Highways Agency's other budgets so that it could get on with dealing with those areas that currently receive no money.

Much more lateral thinking is needed across departmental boundaries about how we can examine the whole picture. The Department of Transport should ensure that other Departments with responsibilities for regeneration, planning for quality homes and streets, and policing have a budget to examine that important issue. I have seen for myself how urban planning in communities throughout Europe has had a huge impact in slowing cars down by, as was mentioned earlier, creating obstacles for them to go round and making it difficult for them to go from A to B. In this country, we are sometimes too focused on detail such as high-quality lighting. I am not against that, but the danger is that we will create an environment in which the car is king—or queen—and rules the roost.

Several new housing developments are being built in my area. If we must change, let us assess the impact of planning on such developments and how we can make what can be very large estates much more amenable to communities. We should have kids playing in the streets, not just another outpost of car culture. We need planning to determine how roads are built around an estate.

Town and parish councils are another source of resources, although they might not like me saying that. I pay tribute to Mr. Barry Livsey and his town council, Finningly, which paid for a speed gun for the local community constable. In partnership, one can work with others to find resources. The Countryside Agency has a fantastic fund called the "Vital Villages Campaign", which provides several types of grant for transport and for slowing down cars going through communities. The key point is that we must make people aware of such sources of money so that they can work in a more imaginative way across different funding lines to achieve what they want to achieve.

We know that not wearing seat belts was a major cause of road deaths. It is a fantastic tribute to a Labour Government and to Barbara Castle that we managed to change the law on seat belts. Speeding, drinking alcohol,

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driving without a licence or insurance, driving when disqualified, and the use of mobile phones all present real challenges for the Government.

In concluding, I should mention Mr. and Mrs. Fox, who tragically lost their son in a road accident because of speeding and who keep me informed of their campaign for reducing speed limits. The Department of Transport should discuss with the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Solicitor General how the criminal justice system deals with survivors and victims of road accidents and their families. I sometimes think that dealing with speeding offences is not seen as warranting the same sensitivity as when someone is raped, murdered or severely injured. I will not go into detail, but there are many questions to be asked about how Mr. and Mrs. Fox's case was dealt with. It is important to note that people deserve justice, and it needs to be understood how seriously a speeding offence can affect real people's lives.

4.53 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I would like to declare that I am joint chairman of the all-party road safety group along with two other Members, one of whom is here this afternoon.

I congratulate the Committee on its report. I would also like to thank the Select Committee Chairman, who addressed a public meeting in my constituency in September in Carver. Concern was expressed at the meeting about the road traffic regulations and a speed limit that is believed to be excessive—a belief with which I agree. There is also an attempt to reduce to 30 mph the speed limit on the A623 through Carver. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) would doubtless agree that the presentation was very effective.

I would like to echo the point made by the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). When we make representations to local authorities on the introduction of new speed regulations, they seem to come up with a huge number of things that need to be done to put them into place. Perhaps the Minister should review the type of regulations that local authorities insist are complied with before they will even consider putting in 30 mph speed limits or any road-slowing mechanisms. We tend to go for a gold-plated job, rather than considering whether more could be done for similar money that would have a far greater impact.

There is another matter on which the Committee should be especially congratulated. The very nature of its report means that it has brought plenty of publicity to the issue. If I have a criticism of the Government it is that I recall we had a debate in the Chamber on road safety every year until 1997. Since 1997, similar debates have not taken place on the Floor of the House, which I regret. They enabled us all to think a little about some issues that surrounded road safety. I do not think that there is a problem with the commitment of any politician on road safety. We all come across fatalities in our constituencies. West Derbyshire has a huge number of visitors, with more than 20 million people coming into the Peak national park each year. Obviously, the result is serious road congestion problems, but also fatalities on the roads.

It is important that the Minister consider how local authorities bring in regulations and other speeding measures. When I was at the Department of Transport with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), we launched a campaign that still runs today—the "Kill your speed, not a child" campaign. The report shows the difference that speed makes to the likely outcome of an accident. Nine out of 10 pedestrians would be killed if a car hit them at 40 mph, but half of them would be killed at 30 mph. At 20 mph, nine out of 10 pedestrians would survive. We have to put that message across.

We must also tell the Government that they should look closely at how local authorities implement safety measures. When roads are constructed, the implications for and the impact on neighbouring roads should be considered. The A50 in my constituency is basically a link road between the M1 and the M6. I have never regarded it as the Doveridge bypass, as I was pressing for it to be. The impact of its completion on subsidiary roads in the area has not been dealt with at all, and such matters can bring serious problems.

I was told that the speed limit on the A623 could not be reduced to 30 mph because it would cost a lot to put up all the necessary signage, make certain road pattern changes and possibly put down differently coloured tarmac to make people aware that they were entering a 30 mph area. One night, I drove through a village called Idridgehay that had a 30 mph speed limit. There was no warning, only a 30 mph sign as one enters the village. People respect the limit because they know that there is danger, but they need to be warned of the danger in such areas.

Although I congratulate the Committee and thank its Chairman personally for coming to West Derbyshire to listen to that specific case, I urge the Government to consider how local authorities sometimes use all the regulations that have to be implemented as a reason not to do anything, or to do deal with an extremely limited number of cases. The Minister could make a quick impact in that regard, which would benefit everyone. I could say much more on the issue, but as time is short I shall leave him with that message.

4.59 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): This has been a really good debate. Following up on the point made so excellently by my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), when I was the Minister responsible for roads and road safety, we had an annual debate in the House of Commons main Chamber, which went on for five hours. We can see from today's debate that three hours is not enough to do justice to one aspect of road safety. I hope that the Minister will take back a strong message to the powers that be that we need a full debate on the wider issues of road safety in the main Chamber during the new Session. I congratulate the Committee and all who have spoken in this debate on the wisdom that they have brought to it. We know that the issue is serious for so many of our constituents.

It is a mistake for us to be caricatured as anti-motorist. I know that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs Dunwoody) was only joking when she said, in response to an interruption, that that was the motorists fighting back. That sort of joke can be

misinterpreted. The hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) brought a degree of balance to the debate. We must emphasise that we have, for the most part, highly responsible and good motorists in this country. We have the best road safety record in Europe, but our motorists have to put up with the highest tax burden on motoring—£38 billion a year. They also have to put up with the lowest investment in roads anywhere in Europe, apart from Greece, and they have to put up with that lack of investment at a local level as well.

Let us pay some tribute to our motorists, and give some balance to the debate. As the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead said, what is important is that speed should be appropriate for the circumstances. Obviously, all speed limits can only be a proxy for the requirement set out clearly in the highway code that people should not go too fast for the circumstances. One does not need a PhD to explain that if it is raining, icy, dark and windy, or if there are children around, people will have to moderate their speed more than in cases where those circumstances do not apply.

We thought at one moment that the Government were going to adopt a completely new 20 mph speed limit for all urban areas. That would be a very big mistake. I do not know if the Minister is going to announce it this afternoon, but I think that if he were, it would be a big mistake. It is quite obvious to people that on many urban roads, in particular circumstances, a speed of 30 mph is perfectly all right. To have a mandatory 20 mph speed limit would be the wrong solution.

When I was in government, we introduced the 20 mph zones, and we introduced the idea that to reinforce those zones we had to have engineering measures that would reinforce the requirements on the motorist to respect any changes in conditions. When I was a Minister I went to Holland—I do not know if the present Minister has been there—to look at some of its zones, in which there is a very good road safety record.

I want to concentrate on one aspect: road engineering. Inevitably, if a Committee produces a report just on speed, it will miss out other areas in which the Government can assist. Traffic-calming measures are largely issues of engineering. The Transport Research Laboratory report No. 382 is entitled "The Numerical Context for Setting National Casualty Reduction Targets". It is an important report and one of the speakers has already referred to the laboratory and the expertise it brings to the subject. It says that in setting out the different policies and the different impacts that they can have on reductions in road casualties, new road safety engineering measures are highest in the league table. Some of those are the areas covered in this excellent report. Road safety engineering measures require resources.

Perhaps it is just spin or leaks from the Department, but I am concerned about what the Government may do to try to meet the demanding but quite proper road safety targets that they have set. The previous set drove down road casualties significantly. Perhaps the Government are worried, as I am, that in 2001 there was the first increase in deaths and serious road injuries for many years. However, it would be wrong of the Government to think that they can just blame motorists and say that it is all because motorists are driving too fast. Many accidents are caused by errors of judgment that have a disproportionate impact. A small or momentary error of judgment, as the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead will know from his experience as a lorry driver, can result in a fatality.

The essence of engineering measures is to try to reduce the impact of those errors of judgment in terms of road casualties. That is why we introduced motorways and dual carriageways. That is why we have crash barriers down the middle of motorways and white lines. It is amazing that, under this Government, a special pressure group has been set up to try to have white lines painted more clearly on some country roads. That should go without saying. The local highway authority should be responsible for keeping white lines clear. Those steps and traffic-calming measures are designed to mitigate the impact of errors of judgment.

We cannot force people to use pedestrian crossings, but we can encourage them to do so if we provide them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said, one sometimes wonders whether there is a mismatch between the resources allocated to safety on the trains, for example, and those allocated to safety on the roads. For a relatively modest investment, one can put in pedestrian crossings and get a very good return.

Another example of something that provides a good return on an investment is 20 mph zones. On page 5 of the response to the Committee's report, the Government say in answer to recommendation (d):

> "We are giving separate grant funding of £3.5 million over financial years 2001-02 and 2002-03 to 28 local highway authorities to introduce 20mph Zones".

Let us consider exactly what that means in context. It means that 28 local authorities will have £125,000 each to spend over two years. However, £125,000 scarcely buys one zone or pedestrian crossing. By giving so little money, the Government are washing their hands of the responsibility to go for it in a big way. If we could get motorists to travel at much lower speeds in urban areas, particularly where there are children, we would have an enormous dividend in improved road safety and be able to reverse the awful statistic that this country has a much higher number of child deaths than elsewhere. I hope that the Government will consider the issue of resources and not just play party politics with it.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Transport announced that there would be an extra £145 million a year to deal with some pinch points on our main road network, but what is £145 million, given that motorists collectively pay £38 billion a year in taxes? Spread over five years, £145 million is only £1 per motorist per year. That is not big money, yet the Government dressed it up as a major announcement. They need to put many more resources into this area, as the Committee identified. However, just talking about putting more money into transport plans is not the whole answer, because those plans embrace public transport as well as expenditure on roads. I hope that the Minister will respond to the legitimate cry for help and more resources for local authorities.

5.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): This has been a full and interesting debate in which 14 contributions have

[Mr. David Jamieson]

been made. First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and her Committee on their report and on giving us the opportunity to debate such an important matter. My hon. Friend did not do herself proud: I have enormous admiration for her. She is dogged and determined, but I have always found her most charming. The report has given us the opportunity to review a number of important matters. My hon. Friend started with chilling statistics. Nine people a day are killed on our roads and about 10 times as many are seriously injured. The figure for minor injuries was so large that she struggled with it for a moment: more than 250,000 each year suffer a minor injury. Although we have one of the best records in the world for casualties on roads, those figures are not satisfactory and are certainly not matters for complacency.

Together with the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy), I did a project with schoolchildren in my area. We asked them what they would like local government to do. It was interesting that the top issue was road safety, speed and the danger they felt when on the road. We have taken that forward with the local authorities and have taken some of the matters back into central Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) made an important point. It is not speed in itself that concerns us, but the casualties of speed. We must tackle the problem of inappropriate speeds and people simply ignoring speed limits. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) raised the case of his nephew who was knocked down and is still in hospital. Will he convey the best wishes of the House to his nephew? We wish him a speedy recovery.

I shall make some general remarks and then try to answer as many of the specific points as I can. The report makes a vital contribution to the road safety debate. It is just over two and a half years since the Prime Minister announced our road safety strategy. The strategy sets challenging targets of a 40 per cent. reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured, and a 50 per cent. reduction for children, which reflects the large numbers of children who are killed or injured. The information that the Select Committee has provided will help us to reform and refine our policies as we progress towards our targets and objectives.

We have a generally good record on road safety, but we want to improve it. It will not be easy. We noted the Select Committee's concerns that on the surface we appear to be moving too slowly and that the promises made in the strategy are taking too long to come to fruition. We in government share the Select Committee's impatience to get action on so many of the matters that my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich raised. However, we must ensure that the action that we take and the resources that we use on any matter of road safety, particularly where speed is involved, are proportionate and appropriate to achieve the desired outcome.

I am aware of the re-education and effort needed to deal with complex matters involving engineering and human behaviour. However, we are confident that we are well on target to meet those ambitions to reduce casualties on our roads by 2010. As a number of hon. Members have pointed out, inappropriate and excessive speed accounts for about one third of all road deaths and injuries. In real terms, that equates to over 1,000 deaths and 10,000 serious injuries each year. Although some commentators have challenged that, there is plenty of evidence and we have had a realistic estimate. We welcome the Select Committee's support, based on the evidence that it received during its deliberations. We are not surprised that it found the scale of the speeding problem unacceptable. I assure the hon. Lady, the members of the Select Committee and the House that it is unacceptable to the Government as well. We are aware of the need to take action to deal with excessive and inappropriate traffic speed and to reduce its effects on accidents, with the tragic consequences and suffering that they bring.

We are working on many fronts with local authorities, as it is they that have the local knowledge and, in many instances, are best placed to introduce measures, supported by guidance and funds from the Government. A good example is the success of the Gloucester safer cities project. For five years it has considered road safety, in particular how speed management can be addressed over a wide area. Although its final report is not due until next spring, the results so far are very encouraging—deaths and injuries are down by as much as 38 per cent. I commend the project to those who have not had a chance to see it as an example of the efficient use of resources to achieve interesting and valuable results.

The "Road Safety Good Practice Guide" was published in 2001 to assist local authorities and practitioners. A number of hon. Members have said that good practice should be distributed. This guide is an excellent example of how we can pass experience from one area to another, so that they can learn from each other. I strongly commend the document to those who have not seen it. We shall keep it regularly renewed so that it is always relevant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich made some important points in addition to the matters raised in the report. She spoke about the importance of Government departments working together. I agree with that. We have worked particularly closely with the Home Office on matters of sentencing and with the police. A number of hon. Members have questioned the commitment of the police force and the Home Office to road policing. A brief statement has been sent to me by the Home Office. It says:

> "We fully recognise the important contribution that road traffic policing makes to reducing deaths and injuries on the roads. That is why improving safety and reducing casualties is one of the police service's over-arching aims and objectives. We do not propose to change this."

I hope that that will assist hon. Members who raised the point.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does the Minister interpret that as meaning that there will be a clear statement to chief constables that road traffic policing must be part of their core responsibilities, or as being a general statement that we are worried about road safety?

Mr. Jamieson: Of course, that is a matter for the Home Secretary, but I think that the statement that I

read out is clear. There is no intention to change the fact that it is an over-arching aim of the police service to commit itself to traffic policing.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the important fact that safety cameras and the safety camera partnerships have reduced casualties. I strongly believe that cameras should be clearly visible. They show that that is a place where casualties and hazards occur. However, the proof of the pudding is the fact that, at the sites where cameras have been placed, there has been, on average, a 47 per cent. reduction in casualties. That is the evidence that we need that the cameras should be clearly visible.

Tom Brake: If research were to demonstrate that covert cameras were more effective in reducing accidents, would the Minister support a change?

Mr. Jamieson: If good evidence were produced to show that any road safety measure was effective, of course we would look at it carefully and implement the measure where appropriate. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, on the sites that were chosen because they suffered from having a considerable number of casualties, the presence and visibility of the camera substantially reduced the number. That is not mere academic research, but practical and tangible evidence before our eyes, which we cannot ignore.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich spoke about sharing good practice and traffic-calming measures. My previous comments on the document suggest how to achieve that. To underline an important point, it is local authorities that deliver many road safety schemes that help to reduce casualty rates, particularly in connection with speed. We have provided guidance to local authorities, so that their local transport plans include appropriate measures for improving road safety. Most important, we have provided the resources for local authorities to carry that work out.

I referred in an intervention to local authority funding. My hon. Friend's authority has had twice as much funding for local transport plans in its current financial year as it had two years ago. Substantial resources will help local authorities to deliver their plans. It is important for hon. Members to examine the local transport plans in their constituencies carefully to establish whether they are meeting their constituents' objectives.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) chided us for not spending enough. We may not be, but I can assure him that we are spending substantially more than was spent under Conservative Governments. If the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle will not, perhaps the hon. Member for Christchurch will intervene to clarify whether the Conservative party would meet and match our funding targets for local transport plans.

Mr. Chope: The Conservative party is committed to doing all that is necessary to reduce casualties on our roads. Unlike the present Government, who have presided over an increase in fatalities for the first time in a generation, we had consistent policy success in reducing such fatalities.

Mr. Jamieson: I think that that was a no, but it is good to have that cleared up.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich also spoke about child casualties and asked why we are waiting for schemes to be developed. Several good schemes, such as the home zone scheme, already involve schools. One in my own constituency has been hugely successful, even within the short period in which it has operated. The safer journey to school initiative and many others adopted by local authorities are a response to people's needs in their own locality. There is no blueprint for improvements, which must be appropriate to local needs.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) made some interesting points, although sadly he is no longer with us. Other hon. Members referred to signage of speed limits and 30 mph repeaters. The problem is that they would have to be rolled out throughout the country. Every authority would have to follow the same system; otherwise, confusion would arise between areas that did and those that did not follow it. This has been part of our law and has proved effective during the past 70 years. It is probably one of the most understood aspects of our road speed system.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about placing cameras in areas where no casualties had occurred. It is rather like sending healthy people to hospital. In a new development where a road had been built dangerously, we have to ask how that had happened. These matters should be considered at the early stages of the planning and development process. They were not considered on many estates years ago, but then many people living in estates had no cars. Today they do and these matters should be built into the design of our estates.

Mr. McWalter: I note with interest my hon. Friend's idea that an estate can be built dangerously. Surely the only danger is if the estate is used inappropriately. If the local authority is properly empowered, there is no reason why an estate should not be built where low speeds are an expectation. There is no such thing as a dangerous estate.

Mr. Jamieson: I beg to differ. Some of the estates built in my constituency in the 1960s had long straight roads with many intersections and were very dangerous. Now they have been traffic-calmed and given chicanes and traffic islands, and the casualty rate has substantially reduced. When we are building estates where people will be living, working and shopping, we should construct them so that pedestrians are safe to go about their business.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) made important points about the effect of speed on pedestrians. He may recall the advertisement from my Department about the effect of travelling just 5 mph over the speed limit. The advertisement had high recognition value and, I believe, quite an impact. However, he was right in saying that we must change people's attitudes to driving and speed. We have recently studied the training of new drivers and completed a consultation on that matter. We were given some good ideas, especially by young people.

[Mr. Jamieson]

Another project that will start in a few weeks is the hazard perception test, which will be part of the driving test. It will involve putting hazards up so that people can see whether they are driving appropriately, as people may approach hazards at too great a speed.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I will not give way, as there is little time left and the hon. Gentleman was not present for the whole debate.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) raised several points, not least about the *Evening Standard* report, which came as a considerable surprise to us. We did not know that we had made an announcement that all road speeds were to be reduced to 20 mph, but it is a newspaper's job to speculate. I think that the paper was anticipating some guidance that we shall give authorities on how they may introduce lower limits. In the end, such matters are for local authorities to decide. On local roads, local authorities must make the decisions, as they are best placed to respond to the local communities and take appropriate action, using the extra money that comes through the local transport plans.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) has a good record on road safety, and I appreciate his contributions. However, I shall gently take him to task on a couple of issues. He said that we had ducked the issue of pedestrian protection, but we certainly have not. By getting a voluntary agreement with manufacturers in Europe on pedestrian protection, we have brought forward by two years the implementation of the proposals. More people will be alive and fewer will be injured because of the action that we have taken.

My hon. Friend also said that we had ducked the issue of drink driving, but we certainly have not. We have the toughest penalties in Europe, some of the most stringent enforcement and the most powerful advertising. We have not ducked those issues but faced them head-on with appropriate and proportionate action.

This has been an excellent debate. Unfortunately, as always, there is insufficient time to cover all points. If hon. Members want to raise further points and want to correspond with me, I shall be happy to respond. However, I must conclude to give my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich the opportunity to make some concluding remarks.

5.28 pm

Mrs. Dunwoody: With the leave of the Chamber, I seek briefly to commend my colleagues who have taken part in the debate. The debate has been serious and has acknowledged the importance of our report. It is important that when the House considers a specific safety problem, whether it is safety on rail, on road or in the air, it gathers evidence that informs elected Members of the size of the problem and the urgency of the need for change, and emphasises the need for our constituents to do something in their general interest. I believe that my Committee has contributed to that process, and that the Government realise how serious the matter is.

I make only one plea: do not let us have to come back here in 12 months' time and have the same debate for the same reasons and with the same difficulties. We are all motorists, pedestrians and users of transport, so let it be safe.

It being half-past five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 19 September 2002

HOME DEPARTMENT

PFI/PPP

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45618]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* From the best information available, the Department has one project classified as a Public Private Partnership (PPP), but figures are unavailable due to the contract value being based on demand and therefore subject to variation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45603]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* From the best information available, I list the differences between preferred bidder price and final contract price in Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) contracts let in the four years since 1 March 1998:

Year	*Net Difference £Million*
1/3/98–28/2/99	+0.7
1/3/99–29/2/00	–22.0
1/3/00–28/2/01	–4.1
1/3/01–28/2/02	+0.5
Total	–24.9

Anglo-Italian Meetings

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last six months *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have met their Italian counterparts; and what subjects were discussed. [56892]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Home Office Ministers and officials participate on a regular basis in European and international fora at which their Italian counterparts are present. In particular, working groups of the European Union Member States meet routinely to discuss Justice and Home Affairs matters.

Specifically, the Home Secretary met briefly with the then Italian Minister of Interior, Mr. Claudio Scajola, on 16 November 2001 during a meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Brussels.

Two representatives of the Italian Ministry of Interior also visited the International Policy Directorate in the Immigration and Nationality Department on 14–15 January 2002 to discuss Italian proposals for the creation of a European border guard.

Correspondence

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 15 May from the hon. Member for Manchester, Central, regarding Mr. G S, Ref 14130/02. [71819]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 19 August.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him of 27 May from the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire, regarding Mr. Peter Elliott, a constituent. [71311]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 26 July.

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Worcestershire of 21 January. [67619]

Mr. Hilary Benn: I apologise for the delay.

A reply to the hon. Member was dispatched on 8 July 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 20 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Faia Ali Bafadhel. [72140]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 22 July 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 22 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Pat McGuinness. [61677]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 20 June 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 30 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Sumerra Riaz. [72148]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 5 September 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 10 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Elma Gzoub. [72142]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 2 September 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 7 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Dave Burley. [72141]

Mr. John Denham: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 24 July 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 10 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Tikka Singh and Inda Kaur. [72144]

Mr. Blunkett: My noble Friend Lord Filkin replied on my behalf on 9 August 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 10 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Saran Singh Taal. [72143]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 22 July 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 29 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. A. Bibi. [72145]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 23 August explaining that his letter had been transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who are responsible for dealing with the issues raised.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average waiting time is for acknowledgement of a passport when handed over the counter in Croydon. [72401]

Beverley Hughes: When a passport or other valuable document is handed into the Public Enquiry Office in Croydon, an acknowledgement letter is issued immediately by the counter officer, listing all of the documents received.

Border Controls

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions have taken place on *(a)* common border controls for the EU and *(b)* action against the clandestine transportation of illegal immigrants through member states. [73211]

Beverley Hughes: We discuss migration and asylum issues with our European Union partners on a regular basis. At the Seville European Council on 21 and 22 June, Member States agreed a range of proposals to deliver more rapid progress on migration and asylum. These include measures to increase co-operation between Member States' national border guard services and to tackle illegal migration. Work is already under way to take forward these proposals.

Operation Street Cred

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of Operation Street Cred in the Wirral. [72867]

Mr. John Denham: Operation Street Cred is a new initiative launched by Merseyside Police on 19 June to tackle youth disorder in Wirral. It is too early to make an assessment of the scheme but I have asked Merseyside Police to keep me informed of progress.

Police Identification Procedures

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time is for fingerprint evidence to be processed in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Thames Valley Police in each year since 1997. [73142]

Mr Denham: Figures for the average time for fingerprint evidence to be processed are not collated for England and Wales.

Thames Valley Police Fingerprint Bureau has a target that fingerprint evidence should be processed within 14 days. For 2001, the 14 day target started from the point where the request to process the evidence is received by the Fingerprint Bureau. In 2002 the 14-day target starts from the point when the request has been allocated to a fingerprint expert within the Bureau. Thames Valley Police have only compiled statistics on the time taken to process fingerprint evidence for the last two years, their figures are:

2001: Out of 622 cases, 97.9 per cent. of cases processed within 14.days.

2002 (to date): Out of 354 cases, 99.2 per cent. of cases were processed within 14 days.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on Identikit support in each police authority area in each year since 1997. [73143]

Mr. John Denham: This information is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Internet Sites (Paedophilia)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking about UK internet sites used as an incitement to paedophilia. [72701]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Incitement to commit a particular offence, for example of child abuse or of a child pornography offence, whether on a website or otherwise, can be dealt with under existing law. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) provides a focal point for reporting material which appears to be illegal. They assess the material and refer any they agree appears illegal to the police for investigation and the Internet Service Provider (ISP) hosting the material, in order that the ISP can close off access to the offending material. Where the material is produced or hosted outside the United Kingdom, arrangements exist for notifying the relevant law enforcement agency and ISP.

The IWF has also recently developed a policy on recommending ISPs to take down newsgroups that regularly contain, or whose names seem to advertise child pornography. We welcome this development and we will continue to monitor the position.

The answer I gave to my hon. Friend the, Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) on 16 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 230W, detailed the work of the Home Secretary's Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet, including its work toward developing new offences and models of good practice.

Youth Offending Teams

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the population of the potential client group for each local authority with youth offending teams has been; how many offences have been recorded since the youth offending teams were set up; what the pro rata offence figures are; what the general, referral and drugs order funding was for 2002–03; and what the pro rata funding allocation for each offender was in that year; [72325]

(2) if he will publish the criteria for the way in which deprivation indices were calculated as part of the formula for funding youth offending teams in England and Wales, indicating differences in calculations made for youth offending teams in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales. [72334]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Youth Justice Board's (YJB) funding is for Youth Offending Teams (Yots) not individual offenders. The payments for general, referral order and drugs work in 2002–03 took into account levels of deprivation (covering employment, income, average of ward scores, ward ranks, extent of deprivation and the local concentration of deprivation) the size of the 10–17 population within each Yot area and its geographical size. The deprivation indices were supplied by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and are used as standard across Government. The formula was approved by the Home Office and the National Assembly for Wales.

A copy of the Youth Justice Board's outcome decision document has been placed in the Library. The annexes show the size of the 10–17 population and the individual grants allocations. The YJB's data covers convictions not offences.

For Welsh Yots, the Barnett formula was applied initially to arrive at the overall grant allocation for Wales. Individual allocations were then calculated by applying the YJB's funding formula.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities with youth offending teams in England and Wales, and the relevant, police, probation and health service bodies, to develop common criteria for assessing *(a)* funding needs and *(b)* the contribution of each partner to the work of the youth offending teams. [72335]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Youth Justice Board issue grants to Youth Offending Teams on the basis of a common funding formula. They first consult Youth Offending Teams (Yots), their statutory partners (including Local Authority Chief Executives) the Home Office and the National Assembly for Wales. But they recognise that the contributions of local statutory partners vary, and plan to put proposals to Ministers on how best to tackle this. There are no plans for such a meeting at present.

Deaths In Custody

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths in custody there were in each of the last 10 years broken down by prison service region, indicating *(a)* where these were challenged at the inquest and *(b)* how many challenges were successful. [72329]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Details of deaths in custody for the last 10 years by current Prison Service area and function are set out in the tables. Figures for natural causes deaths are available from 1996 onwards. No information is held centrally about challenges at inquests.

Table showing the number of self-inflicted deaths in England and Wales by Prison Service Area between 01/01/1991 and 19/07/2002*

Area	*Calendar Year*												*Total*
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	
North East	0	1	2	0	1	1	2	0	4	2	0	5	18
Yorkshire and Humberside	2	4	4	8	5	6	3	11	7	11	3	6	70
East Midlands	1	2	4	1	4	6	4	6	4	5	4	0	41
Lancashire and Cumbria (North West)	3	0	0	3	3	3	9	3	4	3	1	3	35
East Midlands (South)	0	4	3	3	1	2		1	4	4	3	1	26
Manchester, Mersey and Cheshire (North West)	5	2	5	8	1	9	9	8	13	3	4	2	69
Eastern	3	3	2	2	10	3	3	9	6	4	5	1	51
West Midlands	6	3	0	3	4	7	2	4	9	10	5	5	58
Wales	2	0	0	4	1	0	3	7	2	1	6	1	27
South West	3	2	8	4	6	7	4	5	6	4	13	3	65
Thames Valley, Hampshire and Isle of Wight (South East)	6	2	2	6	3	4	6	9	5	9	4	2	58
Kent, Surrey and Sussex (South East)	0	4	3	2	7	4	7	5	4	2	6	4	48
London	6	8	4	11	2	6	4	3	6	12	8	4	74
Women's Prisons and Young Offender Institutions	0	2	1	3	4	1	2	5	4	8	5	3	38
High Security Prisons	5	4	8	3	7	4	8	7	7	2	4	7	66
Juveniles	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	4
Prisoner Escort Custody Service	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	5	0	1	0	9
Total	42	41	47	61	59	64	68	83	91	81	73	46	756

*This table represents Prison Service areas as they currently stand.

Note:

Not all self-inflicted deaths result in a suicide verdict at inquest

Table showing the number of natural causes deaths in prisons in England and Wales by Prison Service Area between 01/01/96 and 19/07/02

Area	Calendar Year							Total
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	
North East	1			1	1	4	2	9
Yorkshire and Humberside	3	3	2	3	3	5	1	20
East Midlands	2	3	3	5	2	1	2	18
Lancashire and Cumbria (North West)	5	2	2	6	6	2	2	25
East Midlands (South)	1	1		1	2	1	1	7
Manchester, Mersey and Cheshire (North West)	3	1	4	3	3	9	2	25
Eastern	8	5	4	4	5	3	4	33
West Midlands	4	3	2	4	2	3	1	19
Wales		1	2	1	1	2		7
South West	3	6	4	9	5	4	3	34
Thames Valley, Hampshire and Isle of Wight (South East)	5	5	6	7	5	6	3	37
Kent, Surrey and Sussex (South East)	5	8	4	4	5	2	4	32
London	3	1	6	3	4	4	2	23
Women's Prisons and Young Offender Institutions	3	1	1	2	1	1	2	11
High Security Prisons	8	8	4	4	11	12	4	51
Prisoner Escort Custody Service							1	1

Table showing the number of homicides in prisons in England and Wales by Prison Service Area between 01/01/91 and 19/07/02

Area	Calendar Year									Total
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	2000	
Yorkshire and Humberside						1	1			2
Lancashire and Cumbria (North West)			1					1		3
Manchester, Mersey and Cheshire (North West)								1		1
Eastern		1	1	1				1		4
West Midlands	1				1			2	1	5
Wales		1							1	2
London									1	1
High Security Prisons	1		1	2	1	1	1			7

Table showing the number of use of force deaths in Prison Service for England and Wales by area between 01/01/91 and 01/01/96

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
London	1			1	1
South West					1
West Midlands					1

Note:

a) There were no use of force deaths in the other regions in this period.

b) There have been no such deaths since 1995.

Offenders (Clinical Audits)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the institutions being *(a)* built and *(b)* extended to deal with offenders; and whether these will be equipped with the appropriate information technology to enable high quality clinical audits to be carried out. [72330]

Mr. Hilary Benn *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) is responsible for commissioning and purchasing juvenile offender secure accommodation from the Prison Service, private sector secure training centres (STC) and local authority secure children's homes, and for setting and monitoring standards.

This year 32 additional places have been opened at Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre and 32 more are due to open at Medway. The STC contracts require trainee personal medical records to be kept to support medical care and investigations, to inform contractors' annual reports and to facilitate any reports needed by courts. The STCs use information technology to maintain these records.

Mobile Telephone Theft

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of robberies recorded by the police in each of the 10 robbery hotspots involved the theft of a mobile phone in the latest period for which figures are available. [73226]

Mr. Denham: Centrally the Home Office does not collect or collate statistics on mobile phone robberies or thefts. Individual police forces do not all routinely collect such figures either, however some do for their own purposes.

Home Office Research Study 235, deposited in the Library, dealt with mobile phone theft and robbery. Information was collected from six police forces on the number of thefts and robberies involving mobile phones for the period 1998–99 to 2000–01. Five of these forces are participating in the street crime initiative covering the 10 forces where the robbery problem is most acute. The proportion of robberies involving the theft of a mobile phone in these force areas is set out in the table.

Proportion of robberies involving mobile phones: 1998–99 to 2000–01

	1998–99 per cent.	1999–2000 per cent.	2000–01 per cent.
Metropolitan Police	12	21	36
West Midlands	7	15	24
Avon and Somerset	4	11	20
Greater Manchester	5	11	20
Lancashire	3	8	13

Source:

Harrington V., and Mayhew, P. (2001). *Mobile Phone Theft.* Home Office Research Study 235

Prisons

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* adult males, *(b)* women and *(c)* juveniles were remanded into Prison Service custody in each of the last 12 months for which figures are available. [73215]

Hilary Benn: The available data are given in the table which shows the number of people received into Prison Service custody as untried prisoners every quarter since April 2001.

			Males by age		*All females*
Year	Quarter	All ages	Aged under 21	Age 21 and over	
2001	Apr–Jun	12,500	3,300	9,200	1,050
	Jul–Sept	12,600	3,300	9,300	1,150
	Oct–Dec	13,700	3,500	10,200	1,150
2002	Jan–Mar	13,300	3,300	9,900	1,190

All data shown are provisional and rounded.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish for each prison the results achieved by the Prison Service on each of its key performance indicators during 2001–02. [72153]

Hilary Benn: The final key performance indicator (KPI) results achieved by each prison are given in the table, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The cost per uncrowded prison place KPI is formulated at overall Prison Service level. The costs in the table are establishment costs only, which exclude Headquarters overheads and the figures are not therefore comparable with the Prison Service cost per place KPI. Costs for private prisons include an element of capital repayment and are not comparable with the public sector. Staff in private prisons are excluded from the Prison Service staff sickness KPI.

A summary of the performance of each prison is given in the Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts for 2001–02.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost of providing *(a)* cash-only support and *(b)* full support was per asylum seeker in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [72931]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the form requested. The average cost of supporting an asylum seeker for one week was:-

£122* for a single person and,

£278* for a family.

Those receiving cash only support receive the following amounts each week.

Levels of support with effect from 8 April 2002

Qualifying couple	£59.26
Lone parent aged 18 or over	£37.77
Single person aged 25 or over	£37.77
Single Person aged at least 18 but under 25	£29.89
Person aged at least 16 but under 18 except a member of a qualifying couple)	£32.50
Person aged under 16	£33.50

*Rounded to nearest £1

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the extra cost of providing full support to those asylum seekers currently receiving cash-only support; and if he will make a statement. [72932]

Beverley Hughes: There are currently no plans to restrict the ability for asylum seekers to apply for cash only support. If in the future it is decided to do this a full appraisal of the costs and benefits involved will be undertaken.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have been detected through the matching of fingerprints as having made two or more applications for asylum in each year since 1993. [73005]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 552W, which provided a cumulative total of the number of individuals detected since 1993. I regret that information requested is not available in any other form.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of failed asylum seekers were removed in the last year for which figures are available; and what the benchmark is against which delivery of the improvement, set out in the Public Service Agreement for which he is responsible, is to be measured. [71610]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The proportion of those removed in 2001–02 that were refused in the same period is only available by examination of individual case files at disproportionate costs.

11,500 failed asylum seekers and their dependants were removed in the last financial year.

As part of the Public Service Agreement process, the Treasury and spending departments agree, in the Technical Notes, the definition of the target and how its achievement will be measured. Following the same process as last time, the Spending Review 2002 Technical Notes will be agreed with the Treasury during the summer and published in the autumn. [72732]

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers previously placed in Yarl's Wood detention centre are now detained in Her Majesty's prisons; and if he will make a statement. [43240]

Beverley Hughes: Immigration detainees who are assessed to pose a control and security risk may be transferred from Immigration Service removal centres to prison accommodation in line with established policy. This will include a number of detainees who were held at Yarl's Wood at the time of the incident together with individuals held at other removal centres. In this respect, as in all others, detainees who were held at Yarl's Wood are not being treated differently to detainees held elsewhere, nor are they being recorded separately. Exact figures for the number of former Yarl's Wood detainees currently held in prison accommodation could be obtained only by examination of individual records at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers were dispersed to Glasgow in 2001; and how many applications for asylum since 1997 have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused. [46982]

Beverley Hughes: As at the end of December 2001, 4,750[1,2] asylum seekers (including dependants) were being supported in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation in Glasgow. The cumulative number dispersed to Glasgow in 2001 is not currently available.

Information on the number of applications for asylum since 1997 which subsequently resulted in the granting of asylum or Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR), or refusals, is not readily available, and could only be obtained by examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

[1]Figure rounded to the nearest 10

[2]Cases where support has been ceased are excluded from this figure

Information for 1997 to the first quarter of 2002 on applications for asylum, and initial decisions made, is shown in the table. (However these initial decisions do not all relate to applications made between 1997 and quarter one 2002). A proportion of applications that receive an initial refusal result in an appeal being lodged.

Table 1: Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, and initial decision[1][2], 1997—Quarter 1 2002

			Cases considered under normal procedures[5]			*Backlog clearance exercise[6]*	
	Applications received[3]	*Initial Decisions[4]*	*Granted asylum*	*Granted ELR*	*Refused*	*Granted asylum or ELR under backlog criteria*	*Refused under backlog criteria[7]*
1997	32,500	36,045	3,985	3,115	28,945	-	-
1998	46,015	31,570	5,345	3,910	22,315	-	-
1999	71,160	33,720	7,815	2,465	11,025	11,140	1,275
2000[p]	80,315	109,205	10,375	11,495	75,680	10,325	1,335
2001[p]	71,700	118,195	10,960	19,510	87,725	-	-
2002[8xp]	19,520	23,105	2,085	6,060	14,965	-	-
Total	321,210	351,845	40,565	46,555	240,655	21,470	2,605

(1) Figures rounded to the nearest 5, with * =1 or 2
(2) Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications received in the same period.
(3) May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January and March 2000.
(4) Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
(5) Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
(6) Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog.
(7) Include some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.
(8) Data are available only for the period January to March 2002.
(p) Figures for 2000, 2001 and 2002 are provisional and subject to change.

Information on asylum applications and initial decisions is published quarterly. Data for the second quarter of 2002 will be available from 30 August 2002 on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.htm

Immigration Cases

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration cases are awaiting allocation to a case worker following receipt of application documents; for how many years the largest outstanding case has been waiting; and how many are from addresses in Beckenham constituency. [73112]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that the information requested is not available. We aim to decide 70 per cent. of all new general immigration applications on initial consideration within three weeks. At present such applications are taking on average around four weeks to decide but we are working to reduce this to three weeks as soon as possible. Applications that cannot be decided on initial consideration are allocated to a case management unit for further consideration. Some of these applications are, at present, taking up to 12 months to consider due to the large number of cases currently in the system. It is not possible to identify applications from addresses in Beckenham without scrutiny of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Emergency Services (Deaths)

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths resulted from the failure of police and fire services to arrive at their destinations *(a)* on the day of the recent London Underground strike and *(b)* the same date in the previous year. [73027]

Mr. Denham: We are not aware of any police or fire service vehicles that failed to reach their destination on the days of the London Underground strike on 17 and 18 July 2002.

Freemasons (Police)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on Freemasons in the police force. [73246]

Mr. Denham: Voluntary arrangements for the declaration of freemasonry membership have been established for the police, the judiciary and other parts of the criminal justice system. The Government have made no decisions about the format of and arrangements for public access to any registers.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers in *(a)* the Metropolitan Police, *(b)* Leicestershire Police and *(c)* Nottinghamshire Police have declared themselves to be Freemasons. [73247]

Mr. Denham: A voluntary survey of freemasonry membership was conducted by forces in 1999. From information provided by forces, the response rate was 34.4 per cent. in the Metropolitan Police Service and 35.1 per cent. in Leicestershire. This includes officers, support staff and special constables in both forces. Of those individuals who responded, 1.83 per cent. in the Metropolitan Police Service and 0.71 per cent. in Leicestershire declared that they were members of the freemasons.

Information in respect of Nottinghamshire Police is not available.

Foreign Students

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign students have received visas to enter the UK to work as seasonal workers in agriculture in each of the last five years, broken down by nation and region. [73055]

Beverley Hughes: The available information relates to the total number of persons who have been granted leave to enter the United Kingdom on the Seasonal Agricultural Scheme. Scheme participants must be students in full-time education and aged between 18–25.

The table shows the number of admissions into the United Kingdom by nationality for the period 1996–2000 inclusive. Information is not available for 2001.

Table 1. Agricultural Workers Given Leave to enter the United Kingdom, excluding EEA Nationals, by nationality, 1996–2001(1)

United Kingdom	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*Number of Persons 2000*
Bulgaria	510	1,150	1,050	1,190	1,290
Cyprus	†	–	–	–	†
Czech Republic	210	300	270	270	250
Slovak Republic	540	830	790	310	370
Hungary	60	70	110	90	100
Malta	–	–	–	–	–
Poland	2,120	3,660	3,690	3,470	3,200
Romania	130	280	190	320	310
Estonia	90	160	180	120	120
Latvia	90	230	250	290	340
Lithuania	710	1,250	1,430	1,370	1,250
Russia	290	190	110	130	210
Ukraine	540	790	1,010	1,670	1,840
Other former USSR	70	140	150	210	420
Switzerland	†	†	–	†	†
Turkey	50	40	20	30	20
Yugoslavia	†	†	–	†	†
Croatia	–	†	†	†	–
Slovenia	†	†	10	†	†
Other former Yugoslavia	30	50	80	140	120
Other Europe	–	–	†	†	†
TOTAL EUROPE	5,440	9,160	9,340	9,610	9,860
Argentina	–	–	†	†	†
Barbados	–	–	–	–	–
Brazil	†	†	–	–	†
Canada	–	†	–	–	†
Chile	–	–	–	–	–
Colombia	–	–	–	–	–
Guyana	–	–	–	–	–
Jamaica	–	–	–	†	–
Mexico	–	–	–	–	–
Peru	–	–	–	–	–
Trinidad and Tobago	–	–	–	–	–
USA	–	†	†	–	†
Venezuela	–	–	–	–	†
Other Americas	†	†	†	–	†
TOTAL AMERICAS	†	10	10	†	10
Algeria	–	–	–	–	–
Angola	†	†	–	–	–
Congo Democratic Republic	–	–	†	–	–
Egypt	†	†	†	†	–

Table 1. Agricultural Workers Given Leave to enter the United Kingdom, excluding EEA Nationals, by nationality, 1996–2001(1)

United Kingdom	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*Number of Persons 2000*
Ethiopia	–	–	–	–	–
Ghana	10	10	10	10	10
Kenya	10	†	†	†	†
Libya	–	†	–	–	–
Mauritius	–	–	†	–	–
Morocco	†	†	†	†	†
Nigeria	†	†	–	†	†
Sierra Leone	†	†	–	–	–
Somalia	–	–	–	†	–
South Africa	–	–	–	†	†
Sudan	–	–	–	–	–
Tanzania	20	10	10	†	10
Tunisia	†	†	†	†	–
Uganda	†	–	†	†	†
Zambia	–	–	–	–	–
Zimbabwe	–	–	–	–	–
Other Africa	10	10	10	20	30
TOTAL AFRICA	80	60	40	60	50
Bangladesh	†	†	–	†	–
India	†	–	†	†	†
Pakistan	†	†	†	†	–
TOTAL INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT	†	†	†	10	†
Iran	–	†	–	–	–
Iraq	–	–	–	–	–
Israel	–	†	–	–	–
Jordan	–	†	†	–	–
Kuwait	–	–	–	–	–
Lebanon	–	†	–	–	–
Saudi Arabia	–	–	–	–	–
Syria	–	–	–	–	–
Yemen	–	–	†	–	–
Other Middle East	†	†	†	–	–
China	†	–	–	10	30
Hong Kong BDTC/BN(O)	–	–	–	–	–
Hong Kong Stateless	–	–	–	–	–
Indonesia	–	–	–	–	–
Japan	†	†	†	–	†
Malaysia	–	–	†	–	–
Philippines	–	–	–	–	†
Singapore	–	–	–	–	–
South Korea	–	–	–	–	†
Sri Lanka	†	†	†	†	†
Taiwan	–	–	–	–	–
Thailand	–	–	†	–	–
Other Asia	†	†	†	30	110
Non-ISC Asia	10	20	10	40	140
TOTAl ASIA	10	20	10	50	150
Australia	†	–	†	10	†
New Zealand	–	†	†	†	†
Other Oceania	–	–	–	–	–
TOTAL OCEANIA	†	†	10	10	†
British Overseas Citizens	–	–	–	–	–
Stateless N–E–S–	10	30	40	30	30
All Nationalities (EXL-EEA)	5,550	9,280	9,450	9,760	10,100

(1)All figures rounded to the nearest 10, or if above 1000 to the nearest 3 significant figures.
– 0
† 5 or less

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what regulations are in force relating to *(a)* the employment of foreign students as seasonal workers in agriculture, *(b)* the standards of welfare and accommodation provided for foreign students employed as seasonal workers in agriculture and *(c)* remuneration of foreign students employed as seasonal workers in agriculture; [73056]

(2) which authority is charged with supervising standards of accommodation welfare and remuneration of foreign students employed as seasonal workers in agriculture. [73053]

Beverley Hughes: The Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme (SAWS) is administered under Home Office oversight by seven approved operators.

A Code of Practice sets out the obligations of all those involved. The recruitment of workers is the responsibility of the operators. Operators must ensure that farmers provide suitable accommodation and access to recreational activities, such as the opportunity to learn English. Operators are also responsible for ensuring that farmers adhere to minimum pay regulations set out by the Agricultural Wages Board. The Board cannot set a minimum rate that is below the National Minimum Wage. Operators may withdraw workers mid-season and exclude farmers from the scheme if they do not provide suitable pay and accommodation.

Silverlands, Chertsey

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place to recover his Department's investment in the refurbishment of Silverlands, near Chertsey, from the Department of Health. [73649]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office is in discussions with the Department of Health about recovering funds expended on Silverlands and this will take into account the increase in the value of the property.

West Midlands Police Service

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money has been given to the West Midlands Police Service by his Department in each of the last eight years. [18912]

Mr. John Denham: The amount of money allocated to the West Midlands Police Authority is as follows:

Government funding

	Home Office Police grant £million	*Revenue support grant (1) £million*	*National non domestic rates (1) £million*	*Home Office Crime Fighting Fund £million*	*Total £million*	*Change per cent.*
1995–1996	163.2	83.2	49.5	0	295.9	6.2
1996–1997	172.3	83.2	54.4	0	309.9	4.7
1997–1998	175.3	90.0	52.0	0	317.3	2.4
1998–1999	190.2	93.5	51.4	0	335.1	5.6
1999–2000	191.3	95.9	55.0	0	342.2	2.1
2000–2001	198.1	94.2	60.8	2.8	355.9	4.0
2001–2002 (2)	205.6	101.3	60.3	7.7	374.9	5.3
2002–2003 (2)	206.2	96.9	65.2	11.8	380.1	3.8

(1) Police Authorities receive National Non Domestic Rates and Revenue Support Grant from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
(2) The figures for 2002–03 are not directly comparable with 2001–02. The National Crime Squad/National Criminal Intelligence Service are now funded centrally, rather than through police authorities. On a like-for-like basis the comparable total for 2001–02 would have been £366.2 million. The year on year percentage change in 2002–03 is calculated on the like-for-like basis.

In addition, the following grants have also been made:

Capital

Under present arrangements, capital grant is paid to police authorities. Grant also continues to be paid towards the annual loan charges on capital sums borrowed under earlier grant rules.

Year	*Capital grant (£million)*	*Loan charges grant (£million)*
1995–1996	6.1	0.6
1996–1997	4.8	1.4
1997–1998	4.5	1.6
1998–1999	3.9	1.1
1999–2000	3.9	1.0
2000–2001	4.3	1.0
2001–2002	4.1	0.6
2002–2003	4.4	0.6

Individual payments

	Purpose	*£*
1997–1998	Police Firearms grant	70,126
1998–1999	Police Firearms grant	19,246
1998–1999	Riot damages policing	75,000
1998–1999	G8 Summit policing	1,143,000
1999–2000	Beacon scheme	99,800
2000–2001	Combating robbery	3,300,000
2000–2001	DNA Expansion Programme	420,000
2000–2001	Execution of warrants	236,757
2000–2001	Fuel Distribution Emergency	1,141,350
2000–2001	NATO Conference	100,000
2001–2002	National Intelligence Model	276,573
2001–2002	DNA Expansion Programme	3,059,498

Individual payments

	Purpose	*£*
2002–2003	DNA Expansion Programme	4,719,520*
2002–2003	Special grant to tackle street crime	1,880,000**

*Estimate at this stage and not yet paid.
**Capital grant of £240,000 and revenue grant of £820,000 for first half year was paid on 31 July 2002. The balance will be paid later in the year.

Crime Reduction Programme

Under the Crime Reduction Programme over £26.7 million has been allocated since 1999 for projects in the West Midlands under the Reducing Burglary Initiative (£3.466 million), Targeted Policing Initiative (£1.754 million), Partnership Development Fund (£3.869 million), Domestic Violence Initiative (£1.2 million), Working in Schools Initiative (£2.4 million), CCTV Initiative (£14 million) and the Prostitution Initiative (£0.076 million).

Non-Lethal Weapons

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the non-lethal weapons approved for use by police forces. [20538]

Mr. Denham: Police forces have CS incapacitant spray, a variety of truncheons and the L21A1 baton round to use as less lethal options. These have all been extensively tested. The Police Reform Act 2002 introduces powers to enable the Secretary of State to make regulations to ensure that forces only use equipment that has been approved.

Dr. Ali Dizaei

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will *(a)* estimate the cost of the investigation and *(b)* list the original reasons for the investigation given to the media, into Dr. Ali Dizaei; and if he will make a statement. (25133)

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 19 July 2001 relating to the costs of the investigation. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the Metropolitan Police briefing to the media on 18 January 2001 said that Superintendent Dizaei had been suspended from duty on a significant number of counts of misconduct, following information received relating to a range of alleged disciplinary and criminal issues that covered matters of dishonesty, attempting to pervert the course of justice, personal misconduct and integrity.

Following Superintendent Dizaei's appearance at Bow Street Magistrates' Court on 28 January proceedings commenced and, as such, sub judice applies.

Retail Crime

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the correlation between *(a)* retail crime and street crime and *(b)* retail crime and drug abuse. [53501]

Mr. Denham: Research carried out by the Home Department about the correlation between crime against retailers and street crime offences has been based on interviews with 1,884 prisoners in custody, carried out in February and March 2000. The full results of this survey are expected to be published later this year.

In a study carried out in London, Liverpool, Nottingham and Sunderland in 1998–99, 64 per cent. of those arrested for theft from shops tested positive for opiates (including heroin) and 41 per cent. tested positive for cocaine. When interviewed, 85 per cent. of those arrested for shop theft reported using heroin or cocaine in the previous year.

In a study carried out on behalf of the Drug Prevention Advisory Service between October 2000 and March 2001, 23 per cent. of the 19,190 arrestees who sought advice on drug or alcohol addiction had been arrested for shop theft. Similarly, 38 per cent. of those who sought advice admitted shop theft to be a main source of income, whilst 48 per cent. admitted shop theft in the previous 30 days.

The survey of crime affecting retailers and manufacturers announced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 23 April, the results of which should be available next spring, will also provide up to date information about crimes against retailers.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to address the problem of violence against shop staff. [71220]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office is working with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to raise awareness of the need to tackle work related violence as part of the Health and Safety Commission's three-year programme of work (2000–03) to help reduce the incidence of work-related violence. The HSE published "Work-related violence: managing the risk in smaller businesses" on 9 July 2002. The publication includes 10 case studies on reducing risk of violence to staff. The HSE has also published specific guidance for the retail sector "Preventing Violence to Retail Staff". "Don't Discount Crime", a new user-friendly crime reduction guide for retailers became available in May 2002. This is being circulated among their members by retail trade organisations (including the British Retail Consortium), who were actively involved in deciding its content and design. It is of particular relevance to small retailers and includes basic guidance on what steps to take to reduce crime as well as what to do in crime situations.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 605W, on retail crime, to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper), if he will list for each regional crime reduction director, the annual budget for crime reduction in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [71305]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon Member to the answer I gave the hon Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 22 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 863W.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what study has been made of the link between alcohol and drug-related violent crime against retail staff. [71219]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: No study has been undertaken to look specifically at the link between alcohol and drug related violent crime against retail staff. However, we are aware from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) ninth annual survey published this year of their concerns about the level of crime affecting retailers and the concerns they have that this is being driven by theft by drug and alcohol abusers. We are carrying out a commercial crime victimisation study of retail and manufacturing sectors later this year (the first for ten years). This will give a firm basis for identifying the main crime problems affecting business and give valuable indicators of the best ways to tackle these issues.

Emergency Services (Refits)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps are being taken to ensure that all vehicles and control rooms are refitted by 2004–05 in the *(a)* police forces and *(b)* fire services; [50507]

(2) what is *(a)* the cost to date and *(b)* the projected cost of refitting vehicles and control rooms in the (i) police forces and (ii) fire services; [50506]

(3) how much funding has been allocated to *(a)* the police forces and *(b)* the fire services to ensure that all vehicles and control rooms are refitted by 2004–05; [50509]

(4) what the timetable is for *(a)* fund allocation and *(b)* the refitting of control rooms and vehicles for (i) the police forces and (ii) the fire services. [50510]

Mr. Denham: On 19 July 2000, the Home Secretary announced that the Government had provided £500 million to meet the costs of the new police radio system, "Airwave" (formerly Public Safety Radio Communications System, PSRCS).

Over the three years of the settlement, £191 million of capital funding has been made available for forces to spend on costs associated with Airwave installation and preparation, for example the refitting of control rooms and vehicles. A further £141 million in revenue funding has also been allocated for "one-off" preparation costs.

The Airwave programme consists of a phased national roll-out, determined by the forces and the main contractor in consultation with the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO). The timetable for fund allocation is linked to this roll-out timetable. The capital allocation is released in advance, at an appropriate time, so that forces are ready for their roll-out date.

The service will replace existing radio systems with modern digital technology by 2005 in England and Wales extending to Scottish forces in 2006.

On 7 May, the Government announced that they would manage, support and fully fund a new national competition for the procurement of a national radiocommunications system for the fire service in England and Wales.

Police Officers

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults on police officers there were, and what percentage were in each police authority, in 2000–01. [58636]

Mr. John Denham: The numbers of recorded crimes of assault on a constable for 2000–01 and the percentage of these in each police force area, are given in the table.

Certain forces (including West Midlands) have moved to a more rigorous crime recording practice before or during 2000–01, in which a larger proportion of crimes reported to them are recorded. This may be a factor, along with the relative sizes of each force, in explaining why some forces' figures are larger than others.

Assaults on a constable recorded by the police, 2000–01

Police Forces	*Offences Recorded*	*Percentage of national total*
Avon and Somerset	312	1.1
Bedfordshire	210	0.8
Cambridgeshire	238	0.9
Cheshire	483	1.7
Cleveland	133	0.5
Cumbria	145	0.5
Derbyshire	571	2.0
Devon and Cornwall	646	2.3
Dorset	287	1.0
Durham	107.7	3.8
Essex	352	1.3
Gloucestershire	261	0.9
Greater Manchester	1905	6.8
Hampshire	636	2.3
Hertfordshire	304	1.1
Humberside	509	1.8
Kent	620	2.2
Lancashire	1239	4.4
Leicestershire	315	1.1
Lincolnshire	178	0.6
London, City of	30	0.1
Merseyside	1429	5.1
Metropolitan Police	1367	4.9
Norfolk	405	1.4
Northamptonshire	331	1.2
Northumbria	1171	4.2
North Yorkshire	426	1.5
Nottinghamshire	477	1.7
South Yorkshire	923	3.3
Staffordshire	748	2.7
Suffolk	255.	0.9
Surrey	266	1.0
Sussex	891	3.2
Thames Valley	802	2.9
Warwickshire	258	0.9
West Mercia	587	2.1
West Midlands	3234	11.6
West Yorkshire	1488	5.3
Wiltshire	276	1.0
Dyfed-Powys	261	0.9
Gwent	641	2.3
North Wales	445	1.6
South Wales	868	3.1
ENGLAND AND WALES	28000	100.0

Assaults on a constable recorded by the police, 2000–01

Police Communications

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of claims by police officers of adverse effects on their health since the installation of the new telecommunications masts in the North West of England. [60530]

Mr. Denham: Prior to the Trade and Industry Committee report on Mobile Phone Masts the Home Office had asked the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) to assess the health and safety aspects of the TETRA technology used by Airwave. The NRPB report concluded that it is unlikely that the unique features of TETRA pose a hazard to health. The Home Office has nonetheless set up a comprehensive research programme to ensure that any residual health and safety concerns that have been received by forces and users are addressed. This includes consultation with epidemiologists and with experts in occupational health.

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the laid down period for the Criminal Records Bureau to process an application for a disclosure; how long it is taking to process applications; and if he will make a statement. [64368]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) has published a set of customer service standards in relation to its response times for Disclosure applications:

Timelines of service	90 per cent. of Enhanced Disclosures issued within three weeks
	95 per cent. of Standard Disclosures issued within one week
	95 per cent. of Basic Disclosures issued within one week

Disclosure Services,[1]

— 382,884 Disclosure applications have been initiated.

— From these, 191,782 Disclosures have been issued.

— It is estimated that 40–50 per cent. of Disclosures are being issued within the three-week service standard for telephone applications (target 90 per cent. for Enhanced Disclosures). About 50 per cent. of both telephone and postal applications are being issued within five weeks.

The Criminal Records Bureau reviews its service standards regularly and accepts that it is currently not meeting these service standards. The Criminal Records Bureau is not yet meeting service standards. To address this, it has introduced a performance improvement plan including: revised procedures, recruitment of additional staff, improved management arrangements and extending working hours; a data entry backlog had been outsourced to Hays Plc's Chennai (India) data processing centre. Special procedures have been introduced for the most urgent cases.

[1] As at 17 March 2002

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money is owed within the Criminal Records Bureau; and *(a)* by and *(b)* to whom it is owed. [73288]

Hilary Benn: As at 31 March 2002 the Passport and Records Agency owed £1,387,126.28 to Capita in unpaid invoices.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time between receipt of a communication by the Criminal Records Bureau and an answer being sent has been in the last year. [64234]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) offers three different ways to contact the Bureau—by telephone, by post or by email. The CRB aims to deal with all enquiries quickly and efficiently. Its target is to answer 90 per cent. of all telephone calls within 20 seconds. For week beginning 7 July 2002 the calls answered within target were 88 per cent., which represents an improvement on previous performance.

The CRB aims to reply to all emails that are sent to the CRB Website address within 24 hours of receipt and indications are that this target is being currently met.

The CRB aims to provide a response to written correspondence within one week of receipt. At present there is no information available to confirm to what extent this target is being met, as the details are not collated centrally.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent steps he has taken to improve the performance of the Criminal Records Bureau. [67925]

Mr. Denham: The Criminal Records Bureau has introduced a performance improvement plan including: revised procedures, recruitment of additional staff, improved management arrangements and extending working hours; a data entry backlog had been outsourced to Hays Plc's Chennai (India) data processing centre. Special procedures have been introduced for the most urgent cases.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the costs to voluntary organisations of becoming registered bodies with the Criminal Records Bureau due to *(a)* charges and *(b)* administration costs. [72390]

Hilary Benn: The fees to become a registered body were announced on 15 February 2001. There are one-off charges of £300 for registration, and of £5 for each additional counter-signatory nominated by the registered person. The administrative costs incurred by registered bodies will depend upon a range of factors including the size of the organisation and the number of applications to be processed.

EU Committees (Scottish Executive Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the EU Committee for the European Refugee Fund (ERF) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70930]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: A date for the next meeting of the European Union (EU) Committee for the European Refugee Fund has not yet been set. It is likely that the next meeting will take place some time in the autumn.

The Committees consist of a representative of each Member State who may be accompanied by additional experts at the expense of the individual Member State. In practice, the United Kingdom is represented on each Committee by a Home Office official and an official from the United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels.

Immigration and asylum matters are reserved subjects and consequently officials from the Scottish Executive have not been members of, and have not attended, the European Refugee Fund Committee. The Scottish Executive is however consulted as necessary on the policy issues arising from the implementation and functioning of the funding programmes.

Christopher Alder

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up a public inquiry into the events surrounding the death of Christopher Alder in police custody in 1998 and subsequent events; and if he will make a statement. [73306]

Mr. Denham: I would refer my hon. Friend to the letter dated 5 July that he received from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Until a decision about whether disciplinary proceedings are to be instigated has been taken and any disciplinary action which might emerge has been completed, it would not be appropriate to consider any request for a public inquiry.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department has taken following the killing of Mr. Christopher Alder in Hull Police Station; what representations have been received from Mr. Alder's family; what has been the response; and if he will make a statement. [6749]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to my letter to him of 15 August 2002, a copy of which is in the Library.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in London broken down by *(a)* London borough and *(b)* London constituency; and if she will make a statement. [72835]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* An anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) is a civil order made by a court which currently can be applied for by a local authority or the police. The table shows the number of notifications received by the Home office of ASBOs issued within Greater London by local government authority up to December 2001. Data are not collected by constituency area.

Number of anti-social behaviour orders reported to the Home Office which have been issued as from 1 April 1999 to 31 December 2001 within Greater London by local government authority

Area	From 01-Apr-99 to 31-May-00 (1)	From 01-Jun-00 to 31-Dec-00	From 01-Jan-01 to 31-Dec-01	Total
Police Force Area / MCC(2)				
Metropolitan Police(3) / GLMCA(4)	9	19	13	41
Local Government Authority				
London Borough (LB)(5)				
Barnet	..	-	2	2
Bexley	..	2	-	2
Bromley	..	1	-	1
Camden	..	5	1	6
Croydon	..	1	-	1
Greenwich	..	-	3	3
Hammersmith and Fulham	..	-	2	2
Hackney	..	-	1	1
Lambeth	..	1	-	1
Lewisham	..	-	2	2
Newham	..	-	2	2
Sutton	..	3	-	3
Westminster	..	6	-	6

(1) Total figure only available for Metropolitan police force area within this period. Local Government Authority not known.
(2) MCC—Magistrates' Courts Committee area.
(3) Including City of London.
(4) Greater London Magistrates' Courts Association.
(5) Only those LBs reporting an ASBO in the period shown are listed.
.. Not available.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate has been made of the success of antisocial behaviour orders in cutting *(a)* vandalism, *(b)* crime, *(c)* nuisance behaviour and *(d)* prostitution and other related activities. [26929]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office review of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) found that ASBOs are successful in reducing anti-social behaviour, and can also act as a deterrent. The review's findings indicate that graffiti and criminal damage were addressed in 36 per cent. of ASBOs, criminal behaviour was addressed in 22 per cent., noise nuisance was addressed in 28 per cent. and prostitution was addressed in five per cent.

Police Telephone Response

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average waiting time is for a telephone call to a local police station which is answered by the central answering service for Avon and Somerset Police. [73262]

Mr. Denham: Management of call-handling in Avon and Somerset is the responsibility of the Chief Constable.

The Chief Constable has informed me that callers to the Avon and Somerset Communications Centre at Portishead, in June 2002, would have waited, on average, 30 seconds.

Detection Rates

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police authorities have the *(a)* highest and *(b)* lowest detection rates in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [73223]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is as follows.

Detection rates—2001–02

Highest	Dyfed Powys	64 per cent.
Lowest	Metropolitan Police	14 per cent.

The overall detection rates are not the best indicator of police performance because detection rates can be affected by a number of factors, including changes in the mix of crime types in a force area. Variations across the country remain worrying, however, and the Police Standards Unit is working with forces to address this.

Numbers of detections rose across England and Wales by 2 per cent. in 2001–02. There were rises in numbers of detections in all crime types except for fraud and forgery—for example, numbers of detections for: burglary rose by 6 per cent.; robbery by 19 per cent. and violent crime by 3 per cent. Once the increase in numbers of crimes due to changes in police recording are taken into account, the detection rate in England and Wales appears stable. Detection rates in 11 forces improved, while a further eight forces showed no change in their detection rates.

Weekend Imprisonment

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the use of weekend imprisonment in other countries. [73221]

Hilary Benn: During the review of the sentencing framework ("Making Punishments Work"—July 2002), the team looked overseas to see how other jurisdictions had handled or dealt with the issues involved in sentencing reform. Of particular interest to the review, in contemplating possible changes to the framework in England and Wales, were those jurisdictions, which had examples of flexible sentences including differing forms of intermittent custody. An analysis of the review's findings is contained in Appendix 4 to the report.

Chief Inspectors

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on pay and responsibilities for the rank of chief inspector within the police service. [72866]

Mr. Denham: It is for the Secretary of State to determine the pay of police officers of all ranks in England and Wales. In doing so, he is required to take into account any recommendation made by the Police Negotiating Board (PNB), the statutory negotiating body,

on which all the main police organisations are represented, including the Police Federation, which represents the interests of chief inspectors.

There is a national salary scale for chief inspectors. Currently, there are five points on the chief inspectors' scale, ranging from £39,153 to £42,309 outside London, and from £40,761 to £43,911 in London. Where individual chief inspectors are placed on that scale depends on a number of factors, including when they attained the rank of chief inspector, the length of time they have spent as chief inspectors and the length of time they spent in the rank of inspector.

Under a PNB Agreement reached on 9 May, and approved by the Secretary of State, changes to the pay scale of chief inspectors will be implemented from 1 April 2003. With effect from that date, there will be only three salary points for chief inspectors, one for chief inspectors who were in post on 31 August 1994, and two for all other chief inspectors. Chief inspectors who were in post on 31 August 1994 will receive £42,711 outside London and £44,313 in London. All other chief inspectors will start on £40,362 (£41,973 in London), the first point of the scale, and then progress to £41,973 (£42,780 in London). Once they have completed a year at the top of their scale, chief inspectors will be eligible for the new competence-related payment of £1,002 a year.

Chief inspectors perform a range of duties and responsibilities, and while many of the activities are common, there will be different responsibilities for operational and detective officers. All officers in the rank of chief inspector are required to exhibit leadership and management qualities and to take on responsibility for community safety and local crime initiatives, which includes developing local crime and disorder strategies. Operations chief inspectors would be responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring local crime and disorder plans, for formulating contingency plans for major incidents, and for managing public order and major incidents. Detective Chief Inspectors would primarily be responsible for managing and advising on criminal investigations.

Police Ranks

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* sergeants, *(b)* inspectors and *(c)* chief inspectors there were in March 2000; and how many he estimates there will be in Spring 2003. [72865]

Mr. Denham: On 31 March 2000 there were 18,500 sergeants, 5,941 inspectors and 1,574 chief inspectors in the police service in England and Wales.

We have set a target for there to be 130,000 police officers by March 2003 and are on track to achieve this. It is for individual chief officers of police to determine, within available resources, the number of officers there should be in each rank.

Police Custody Deaths

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1248W, how many of the deaths resulted in *(a)* an internal inquiry, *(b)* an external inquiry and *(c)* compensation being paid to the next of kin of the victims. [73248]

Mr. Denham: All deaths in police custody are subject to a full police investigation. Where such a death occurs the police are required to refer the investigation to the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) for supervision. It is the responsibility of the PCA supervising member to approve the appointment of the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO), either from the force where the death occurred or from another force, and to agree the terms of reference for the SIO covering the parameters of the investigation. The PCA recently published their supervision manual which sets out the Authority's approach to supervision and the standards its supervising members will apply.

Under the Police Reform Bill the PCA will be replaced by a completely new body called the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). The IPCC will be at the heart of a new police complaints system, the key objective of which will be to increase public confidence and trust in the way in which complaints against the police are dealt with. In order to achieve this the IPCC, which will be wholly independent of the police and which will have its own investigating teams, will be able to choose to investigate complaints itself. There will also be improved access to the complaints system for complainants, and significantly greater disclosure of information to complainants.

Information about the number of deaths that resulted in compensation being paid to the next of kin of the victims is not collected centrally.

Commercial Poppy Growing

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what purpose commercial poppy growing has been licensed in Hampshire; and if he will make a statement. [72846]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Approximately 400 hectares of opium poppies are being grown in the United Kingdom, mostly in Hampshire, to provide some of the raw material required for the manufacture of medicines such as codeine and morphine. The amount represents but a small proportion of the total required, which is sourced mainly in Australia, India, Spain and Turkey.

This is the first time opium poppies have been grown commercially in this country for medicinal purposes, although smaller amounts have been grown traditionally for culinary use of the seeds and for dried flower arranging.

Cultivation of the opium poppy is not subject to the licensing requirements of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 but details are furnished to the International Narcotics Control Board under the estimating and statistical provisions of the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961. The process is being monitored by the Home Office Drugs Branch which has arranged for police to be informed of the growing sites.

Criminal Justice and Court Services Act

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parents have been

imprisoned as a result of their children's truancy under the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. [73229]

Hilary Benn: The availability of imprisonment on a sentence in cases where parents who know that their child is not attending school and have taken no reasonable steps to secure their attendance came into force on 1 March 2001.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Mahmoud Abu Rideh

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he will take following the statement of Mr. Justice Collins at the Special Immigration Appeals Commission regarding the condition of Mahmoud Abu Rideh and if he will make a statement. [65252]

Beverley Hughes: Further psychiatric assessments of Mr. Abu Rideh have been carried out and a warrant authorising his transfer to Broadmoor was signed on 19 July, after approval of the Home Secretary. Mr. Abu Rideh is now in Broadmoor and is receiving treatment.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of the public service agreements of his Department set out in the document "Public Services for the Future 1998" have been met; and if he will make a statement. [68712]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* The comprehensive spending review undertaken in 1997–98 produced 31 targets for the Home Office over the period April 1998–March 2001. Out of these 31 targets 19 have been achieved (61.30 per cent.), six have been transferred to other Government departments as a result of machinery of Government changes (19.35 per cent.) and six have been rolled forward (19.35 per cent.).

Out of the 19 that have been achieved, many have been incorporated into Public Service Agreement, Spending Review (PSAs) or Service Delivery Agreement (SDAs) through the SR2000 process. Out of the six that were rolled forward, five did not have completion dates within the timescale of 1998–2001 and have been extended into PSAs or SDAs in the SR2000 process, with more clearly defined dates and targets.

The Home Office Annual Report was laid before Parliament in July and outlines in more detail performance against targets. The attached tables outline which targets have been met and which have been rolled forward.

Table 1: 1998–2000 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) Targets and their Amendments

*1998 CSR PSA** Target	*Amended SR2000 PSA** Target (See also Table 2)
1. To reduce vehicle crime from its current level by 30 per cent. within 5 years.	Rolled forward. 1. Reduce the key recorded crime categories of: —Vehicle crime by 30 per cent. by 2004 —Domestic burglary by 25 per cent. with no local Authority area having a rate more than three times the national average, by 2005; and —Robbery in our principal cities by 14 per cent. by 2005.
2. An improvement in police efficiency of 2 per cent. a year.	Achieved—target rolled forward. 17. Ensure annual efficiency gains by police forces are worth in total at least two per cent. of overall police spending in that year.
3. Launch the new evidence based crime reduction programme.	Achieved
4. Tackle domestic violence through a range of practical measures including increasing public awareness, improving agencies' response and developing an information base.	Achieved—target contributing to new PSA. See PSA target 1 in Table 2.
5. Agree an annual target, with the United Kingdom (UK) Anti Drugs Co-ordinator, for the police to ensure efficient and effective action against drug suppliers	Achieved. (Now incorporated as SDA in PSA 4)
6. Publish survey results on levels of fear of crime and set targets for improvement in specific areas	Achieved—target rolled forward into new PSA. See target 2 in Table 2.
7. Reduce the time taken from arrest to sentence or other disposal.	Specific targets set. 8. Reduce by 2004, the time from arrest to sentence or other outcome by: —Reducing the time from charge to disposal for all defendants, with a target to be specified by 31 March 2001; —Dealing with 80 per cent. of youth court cases within their time targets; and —Halving from 142 to 71 days by 2002 the time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders and maintaining that level thereafter.
8. Reduce the time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders from 142 days to 71 days	Achieved. See target 8 in Table 2 below.
9. Improve the satisfaction levels of victims and witnesses with their treatment in the CJS.	7. Improve by five percentage points the satisfaction of victims and witnesses with their treatment by the CJS by 2002 and thereafter at least maintain that level of performance.
10. Reduce the number of terrorist incidents securing effective well-co-ordinated and proportionate anti-terrorist policies	Achieved
11. Prepare new UK-wide anti-terrorism legislation	Achieved
12. Develop closer and more effective international co-operation to counter terrorism	Achieved. This has become a Service Delivery Agreement and is ongoing.
13. Increase the percentage of identified crime groups: under investigation; in respect of which arrest have been made; in respect of which prosecutions have been brought; and which have been dismantled.	Achieved—target rolled forward into new PSA. 4. Disrupt 10 per cent. more organised criminal enterprises by 2004.

Table 1: 1998–2000 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) Targets and their Amendments

1998 CSR PSA Target*	*Amended SR2000 PSA* Target (See also Table 2)*
14. Ensure the two-year reconviction rate for those receiving community sentences remains below the rate predicted for those offenders.	9. Reduce the rate of reconviction:
15. Reduce the reconviction rate for persistent young offenders.	—Of all offenders punished by imprisonment or community supervision by five per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate; and —Of all young offenders by five per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate. Achieved. Achieved. Forms supporting SDAs to reconvictions target (no. 9)
16. Improve supervision programmes run by the probation service and prison regimes that require offenders to face up to their offending behaviour, and introduce a system of independent accreditation covering probation as well as prison programmes 17. Double the number of completions of accredited offender behaviour programmes (OBP) from 3,000 to 6,000 a year by 2001–02, including an increase from 680 to 1100 in those completing sex offender programmes (SOTP)	Achieved—target rolled forward. (SOTP target not achieved). This has become a Service Delivery Agreement under target 9.
18. Reduce the proportion of discharged prisoners who are at Level 1 or below for literacy and numeracy skills by 15 per cent. by April 2002	Achieved—this has become part of the Service Delivery Agreement and reworded to read: Increase the educational and vocational qualifications of offenders with: —23,400 accredited educational/vocational qualifications in 2001–02 and 36,200 in 2003–04 including an increase in the number of level 2 basic and key skills awards from 18,000 to 21,000 in the Prison Service; and —12,000 completions of level 2 basic skills awards in 2003–04 with 6,000 completions in 2002–03 in the Probation Service. Achieved. Further extended as SDA to reduce to 10 per cent. by 2004.
19. Reduce the rate of positive random drug tests from a 20 per cent. target in 1998–99 to 16 per cent. in 2001–02; and to provide access to voluntary drug testing for all prisoners by April 2002 20. Pilot Drug Treatment and Testing Orders; provide treatment for problem drug users in prison which is then followed through under post-release supervision; increase number of offenders entering treatment programmes as a result of arrest referral schemes and post-release supervision	Achieved. Roll-out of orders, arrest referral etc. has become a Service Delivery Agreement.
21. Maintain existing performance of no escapes by high risk prisoners; and the overall rate of escapes from prisons to be no higher than 0.17 per cent. of average prison population. 22. Promote race equality and develop new indicators to measure improvement.	Achieved — target rolled forward into new PSA. 10. Maintain the current low rates of prisoner escapes including no category A escapes. Achieved—target rolled forward into new PSA and indicators developed.
	16. Promote race equality, particularly in the provision of public services such as education, health, law and order, housing and local government, and measure progress by the annual publication of Race Equality in Public Services, a set of race equality performance indicators across the public sector; and achieve representative workforces in the Home Office and its police, probation and prison services. Achieved - now incorporated into PSA 16. See target 16 in Table 2.
23. Set targets by June 1999 to increase the number of people from ethnic minorities in Home Office and its services 24. Increase the quantity and quality of people's involvement in their community and ensure fulfilment of the vision of the Giving Age.	15. Make substantial progress by 2004 towards one million more people being actively involved in their communities. Achieved. Transferred to Lord Chancellor's Department July 2001
25. Incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law 26. Improve the level of public confidence in the democratic process, through the introduction of PR for European elections; by legislating for the registration of political parties; by introducing a new system of controls on political party funding; and by carrying out a review of electoral procedures and making recommendations during 1999	Transferred to Lord Chancellor's Department July 2001
27. Introduce legislation providing for freedom of information	Achieved. Transferred to Lord Chancellor's Department July 2001
28. Reduce the time taken to final decision of asylum applications to six months by April 2001.	13. Ensure that by 2004, 75 per cent. of substantive asylum applications decided within 2 months.
29. Reduce fire related deaths in the home by 20 per cent. by 31 March 2003, from an average starting point of 380 a year 30. Reduce the number of fires by 31 March 2002 to a level lower than that currently projected on long-term trends (projected levels: 608,100 pa–633,500 pa)	Transferred to Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions July 2001 Transferred to Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions July 2001
31. Improve fire service efficiency by two per cent. a year	Transferred to Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions July 2001

*Public Service Agreement

Table 2: PSA Target for 2001–04 with cross-reference to Table 1

PSA Target	*Amended from 1998 target number:*	*Present Status*
1. Reduce the key recorded crime categories of: —Vehicle crime by 30 per cent. by 2004; —Domestic burglary by 25 per cent. with no local authority area having a rate more than three times the national average, by 2005; and —Robbery in our principal cities by 14 per cent. by 2005.	1	Ongoing
2. Ensure by 2004 that the levels of fear of crime in the key categories of violent crime, burglary and car crime, reported in the British Crime Survey (BCS), are lower than the levels reported in the 2001 BCS.	6	Ongoing
3. Reduce by 2004 the economic cost of crime, as measured by an indicator to be developed by March 2001.	New	Ongoing
4. Disrupt 10 per cent. more organised criminal enterprises by 2004.	13	Ongoing
5. Improve the level of public confidence in the CJS by 2004, including improving that of ethnic minority communities.	New	Ongoing

Table 2: PSA Target for 2001–04 with cross-reference to Table 1

PSA Target	*Amended from 1998 target number:*	*Present Status*
6. Increase the number and proportion of recorded crimes for which an offender is brought to justice.	New	Ongoing
7. Improve by 5 percentage points the satisfaction of victims and witnesses with their treatment by the CJS by 2002 and thereafter at least maintain that level of performance.	9	Ongoing
8. Reduce by 2004, the time from arrest to sentence of other outcome by: —Reducing the time from charge to disposal for all defendants, with a target to be specified by 31 March 2001; —dealing with 80 per cent. of youth court cases within their time targets; and —halving from 142 to 71 days by 2002 the time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders and maintaining that level thereafter.	7,8	Ongoing
9. Reduce the rate of reconviction: —of all offenders punished by imprisonment or community supervision by 5 per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate; and —of all young offenders by 5 per cent. by 2004 compared the predicted rate.	14,15,16,17,18	Ongoing
10. Maintain the current low rates of prisoner escapes including no Category A escapes.	21	Ongoing
11. Reduce the proportion of people under the age of 25 reporting the use of Class A drugs by 25 per cent. by 2005 (and by 50 per cent. by 2008).	New	Ongoing
12. Reduce the levels of repeat offending amongst drug-misusing offenders by 25 per cent. by 2005 (and by 50 per cent. by 2008).	19,20	Ongoing
13. Ensure that by 2004, 75 per cent. of substantive asylum applications are decided within two months.	28	Ongoing
14. Enforce the immigration laws more effectively by removing a greater proportion of failed asylum seekers.	New	Ongoing
15. Make substantial progress by 2004 towards one million more people being actively involved in their communities.	24	Ongoing
16. Promote race equality, particularly in the provision of public services such as education, health, law and order, housing and local government, and measure progress by the annual publication of Race Equality in Public Services, a set of race equality performance indicators across the public sector; and achieve representative workforces in the Home Office and its police, probation and prison services.	22	Ongoing
17. Ensure annual efficiency gains by police forces are worth in total at least two per cent. of overall police spending in that year.	2	Ongoing

Accommodation Centres

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what child welfare frameworks and inspection regimes will apply to accommodation centres under the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill; and to what extent it is his policy that the provisions of the *(a)* Children Act 1989, *(b)* Children (Scotland) Act 1995, *(c)* Care Standards Act 2000 and *(d)* Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 will apply. [55331]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* I will write to my hon. Friend.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 3 July, on accommodation centres, when *(a)* he and *(b)* representatives of his Department have discussed the use of the former Royal Air Force Turnhouse site with BAA Lynton; and if he will place in the Library the minutes of the meetings. [69194]

Beverley Hughes: There has been dialogue over recent months between representatives of the Home Office officials and BAA Lynton.

The details of this dialogue cannot be placed in the Library for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Dublin Convention

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the EU Committee on the system for comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of the Dublin Convention (Eurodac) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70928]

Beverley Hughes: The EURODAC system itself is not yet operational. There are no immediate plans for the Committee established by Article 23 of the EURODAC Regulation to meet. Immigration and asylum matters are reserved subjects and consequently officials from the Scottish Executive are not members of the Committee. A Home Office official and an official from the United Kingdom (UK) Permanent Representation in Brussels will represent the UK at meetings of the Committee.

Paedophilia

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were *(a)* reported for and *(b)* convicted of offences related to paedophilia and how many of the latter were repeat offenders in Wales in the last five years; [71004]

(2) how many of those convicted of offences relating to paedophilia *(a)* lived, *(b)* worked and *(c)* were reported within 10 kilometres of a children's home in Wales in the last five years; [71003]

(3) how many people were *(a)* reported and *(b)* convicted for offences related to paedophilia per person aged 18 and under in Wales, in the last five years. [71024]

Hilary Benn: There is no definitive list of offences relating to paedophilia. The information collected centrally relates to a range of offences (including those involving direct contact with the victims and others that do not) against victims of a variety of ages, some of which span the legal age of consent to sexual activity.

The government have announced that they will publish in the autumn its plans for comprehensive reform of the framework of sexual offences.

Marsham Street

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which consultant is advising on his new Department's building in Marsham Street; and for what reasons this consultant is tendering for hydrofluorocarbon air-conditioning. [71356]

Beverley Hughes: As announced on 26 March, the contract for the Home Office's new Head Quarters building in Marsham Street has been signed with Annes Gate Property (AGP). Battle McCarthy is the consultant in the design team retained by AGP's design and build sub-contractor, Bouygues UK Ltd. The Home Office also retains an environmental specialist through its external surveyor monitoring the design development by AGP and their sub-contractor.

For AGP, Bouygues UK Ltd is tendering for the hydroflourocarbon (R407C) refrigerant in the air conditioning as this substance achieves environmental friendliness and gives best value for money. The substance has a positive rating in the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM), which is the recognised evaluation process for measuring the environmental level of a building and it also meets all UK quality standards.

Refugees

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what schemes his Department *(a)* has in place and *(b)* plans to put in place to assist refugees living in Scotland find employment. [71724]

Beverley Hughes: The National Refugee Integration Forum, which consists of representatives from Government departments, local authorities, the voluntary sector and refugees themselves, oversees the development of the overall integration strategy for refugees across the United Kingdom (UK). Access to employment is a key to enabling refugees to achieve their full potential in the UK. The Forum has established an Employment sub group to look specifically at the barriers to work that refugees face, and how these barriers can be removed.

Amongst measures examined so far are the provision of appropriate English language training, provision of information about the UK labour market, and raising awareness amongst potential employers of the skills and qualifications that refugees bring with them to the UK.

The National Forum has also assisted in the establishment of a Scottish Refugee Integration Forum, chaired by the Minister of Social Justice Margaret Curran MSP, to look at the issues facing those refugees who have settled in Scotland. Mirroring the National Forum, the Scottish Forum has also established a satellite group to consider the barriers to employment from a Scottish perspective.

The Home Office also funds a number of refugee integration initiatives in Scotland through the Refugee Integration Challenge Fund and the European Refugee Fund. These are:

Glasgow ESOL Forum (£26,000): A project to train ESOL tutors for refugees, rent premises and obtain teaching materials

YMCA, Glasgow (£42,779): The project aims to assist asylum seekers whose applications for asylum or exceptional leave to remain are granted, by assisting with access to accommodation, providing training in English and in the life skills cultural and other aspects of life in Scotland.

Scottish Refugee Council (£50,579): To establish Refugee Community Organisations (RCO's) in Scotland that support refugees integration into the surrounding community and assisting refugees to set up their own RCOs.

Passports

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British passports have been issued to individuals previously citizens of the overseas territories broken down by *(a)* territory, *(b)* age and *(c)* sex; and what assessment he has made of the efficiency of the operation. [71653]

Beverley Hughes: There is no single system for issuing passports to people who are British citizens under the British Overseas Territories Act 2002. Those who are resident in the United Kingdom may apply to the usual Passport Office for their region. Those resident in territories where British passport issuing facilities are available locally or through a convenient British diplomatic post may apply in the territory. As a temporary measure until alternative arrangements are in place, applications in other territories are being sent to the Liverpool passport office for processing. Figures are available only for those applications dealt with at Liverpool and are given in the table. Applications from UK residents are being dealt with at the same speed as other first applications: 2 weeks for the standard service, 1 week for the fast track service at United Kingdom Passport Service counters. The total turnaround times for applications from overseas territories dealt with in Liverpool depend mainly on transport links between the territory and the UK; the Liverpool office handles the application within the 2 week standard service.

Applications dealt with 21 May to 18 July 2002

	Child	*Adult*		
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Anguilla	82	83	40	43
Ascension	20	11	5	1
British Virgin Islands	109	102	38	30
Cayman Islands	99	77	19	5
Gibraltar*	104	105	22	13
Montserrat	43	28	7	12
St Helena	25	30	5	7

* Includes 104 adults and 26 children registered as British citizens under Section 5 of the British Nationality Act 1981

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information will be held on the proposed passport card. [72547]

Beverley Hughes: The proposed passport card will hold the same personal data as currently contained in the United Kingdom passport. In addition biometric information is being considered for inclusion in both passport cards and passport books.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the number of fraudulent UK passports in existence and circulation. [72107]

Beverley Hughes: It is not possible to say how many fraudulently issued United Kingdom passports there are in existence or in circulation. The UK Passport Service does not routinely collate comprehensive information on the number of passports which have been identified as having been issued on the basis of fraudulent applications. Also, the Passport Service is not always informed when such passports come to light.

The Passport Service does measure detected fraud and has recently identified some 800 fraudulently obtained passports through its automated check on the death records of under 18 year olds in England and Wales. Details of these passports have been circulated to law enforcement agencies in the UK and to authorities abroad.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what examples of passport cards in other jurisdictions he studied in his proposals for a passport card. [72123]

Beverley Hughes: The concept of a card form of a passport has only recently been embodied into published International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) specifications (1999). Officials from the United Kingdom Passport Service have exchanged ideas about the development of passport cards with Canadian and Australian colleagues. Information has also been exchanged with Swedish, United States and New Zealand passport officials

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the US Government regarding the acceptability of his proposed passport card as a replacement for the traditional passport for UK citizens entering the US. [72122]

Beverley Hughes: The UK Passport Service's plans for a passport card are based on it not being a replacement for the passport book. Individuals will be issued with both documents.

The card is planned primarily as a convenient travel document for United Kingdom citizens to use in Europe. In addition an extension of its use, via bilateral agreements, to countries not requiring UK citizens to hold a visa will be pursued. Discussions between officials from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have indicated a secure passport card would be acceptable, but no formal approach has been made to gain acceptance from these countries.

The US is currently revising its border control strategy, including visa waiver arrangements. This may impact on the acceptability of a UK passport card in the US.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* European Union and *(b)* international standards with which a passport card must comply. [72121]

Beverley Hughes: Standards for machine readable travel documents have been established by International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). This United Nations body publishes specifications in Document 9303 in three separate parts. Part 1 covers passports, Part 2 visas and Part 3 cards.

These standards have wide international acceptance. Part 1 of the document includes card forms of the passport within its scope but refers to Part 3 for the technical specifications that should apply. A United Kingdom passport card will comply with the specifications in Part 3.

European Union member states comply with Doc 9303 for the design of their travel documents. In addition, member states of the European Union have agreed on a joint resolution on minimum security standards for travel documents. The UK passport card will comply with this resolution.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if a person may countersign a passport application if they themselves do not possess a passport. [72527]

Beverley Hughes: No. A requirement for countersignatories to be British or Irish passport holders was introduced at the same time as the definition of acceptable countersignatories was broadened. Applications may now be countersigned by any professional persons or persons of standing in the community, but they must hold a current United Kingdom or Irish passport. This gives applicants the widest choice of countersignatories at the same time as improving security by allowing a 100 per cent. check on the identity of countersignatories from the UK Passport Service records or by arrangement with the Irish authorities.

Volunteers

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether volunteers are entitled to receive criminal records checks free of charge; and what assessment has been made of the charges made by umbrella bodies to volunteers wishing to receive checks through the Criminal Records Bureau. [72476]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* It was announced in February last year that Standard and Enhanced Disclosures would be issued free by the Criminal Records Bureau in the case of volunteers.

Estimates by a number of organisations as to the level of costs charged by countersigning bodies—whether by an organisation—acting on its own behalf or an umbrella body countersigning applications at the request of others—have varied very considerably, depending upon a range of factors including the size of the organisation and the number of applications to be processed. In guidance for umbrella bodies, the Bureau has urged that any charges made for providing the service should be kept to a minimum. Organisations wishing to use an umbrella body are advised to enquire about, and to compare, any such charges.

We have been determined that all those wishing to access the Criminal Records Bureau's (CRB's) service should have ready means of access. Up to 16 July, a total of 917 umbrella bodies had been registered by the Criminal Records Bureau. Of those, 442 have agreed to act as "open" umbrella bodies to provide this service for bodies outside their own circle or sector), of which 65 are voluntary bodies. Voluntary organisations needing to find an umbrella body should access the CRB's website www.disclosure.gov.uk which has an umbrella body search facility, or contact the CRB direct on 0870 90 90 811. Organisations are continuing to apply for registration, and the number of umbrella bodies will increase. We are actively exploring means of developing the network further.

Charities

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance and advice his Department provides to charities having difficulty obtaining public liability insurance after 11 September 2001. [72015]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* I am aware of the problems being experienced by charities, especially those in the voluntary and community sector, as a result of the volatility in the insurance market since 11 September 2001. It is deeply worrying that small groups of volunteers who are making a real contribution to their communities are being faced with such difficulty.

The Active Community Unit in the Home Office is advising charities in the voluntary and community sector to contact, in the first instance, two organisations who have been successful in negotiating public liability insurance for their membership. Additionally, the Active Community Unit is holding discussions with interested parties from the voluntary and community sector, other interested government departments, the Charity Finance Directors' Group and the insurance industry, to see what more can be done. An exploratory meeting to focus on this issue took place on Wednesday 24 July.

Anti-Semitism

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* arrest and convict those involved in (i) distributing anti-semitic material and (ii) anti-semitic activity against people and property; and if he will make a statement. [73006]

Beverley Hughes: The police and Jewish bodies continue to work closely to safeguard Jewish people and property. The Government are in close touch with the Community Security Trust of the British Board of Deputies, which provides up-to-date details of anti-Semitic activity in the United Kingdom, such as assaults and criminal damage. Home Office officials have also met leading representatives of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS) in order to discuss the recent increase in anti-Semitic activity within University campuses.

The Government are fully committed to tackling anti-Semitism and racism generally wherever it occurs. Under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986 it is an offence to use threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour with intent or likelihood to stir up racial hatred. The offence covers inflammatory comments made in public or in the media as well as the distribution of printed material. The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 increased the maximum penalty for incitement to racial hatred from two to seven years' imprisonment. Additionally, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced nine new racially aggravated offences, including assault and criminal damage, for which the maximum penalties available to the courts are substantially increased if it can be shown that there was evidence of racial hostility to the offences.

The investigation of possible breaches of these laws is an operational matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. We would therefore urge anyone who believes these laws to have been breached to report the matter to the police.

Charitable Status

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those organisations which have had charitable status withdrawn since June 2001, stating the reasons in each case. [72766]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* This is a matter for the Charity Commission, as the Government Department that registers charities in England and Wales. The Chief Charity Commissioner will write to the hon. Member concerning charities in England and Wales and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Police Numbers (London)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on recent levels of crime in areas where police have been taken away to deal with security in London. [28936]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 22 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 830W.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out for each Civil Service grade within his Department the *(a)* total number of staff employed and *(b)* the number aged (i) 16 to 25, (ii) 26 to 35, (iii) 36 to 45, (iv) 46 to 60 and (v) over the age of 60 years. [32888]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 1160W.

Secondments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will list the names of staff who have been seconded to his department from the private sector since May 1997, indicating *(a)* the names of the organisation from which each has come, *(b)* their responsibilities and Civil Service grades within his Department, *(c)* the organisation responsible for paying their salary and *(d)* the start and dates of their secondment. (35835)

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 12 February 2002]:* Secondments are part of the Interchange initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: Voluntary, Education, Health, Public and Private. Interchange provides opportunities for civil servants to learn new skills, widen their experience and develop ideas. It also brings in skills and experiences from other sectors.

Available information from the periods in question is listed in the table. Information for 2001–02 is not yet available.

May 1998 To April 1999

Number of Staff	*Name of Organisation*	*Home Office Dept*	*Grade and Responsibilities*	*Duration*
1	Woolwich Building Society	Home Office (London)	Senior Civil Service	1/7/98 to 1/1/99
1	Natwest	Home Office (London)	Senior Civil Service	18/1/99 to 3/12/99

May 1998 To April 1999

Number of Staff	*Name of Organisation*	*Home Office Dept*	*Grade and Responsibilities*	*Duration*
1	Systems Union Ltd	Home Office (London)	Senior Civil Service	Not available

May 1999 To April 2000

Number of Staff	*Name of Organisation*	*Home Office Dept*	*Grade and Responsibilities*	*Duration*
1	PWC	Home Office (London)	Grade 7	4/8/99 to 3/8/2000
1	Capita Ras	Home Office (London)	Senior Civil Service	1/10/99 to 30/9/01
1	British Telecom	Home Office (London)	Grade 6	18/10/99 to 30/9/01

May 2000 To April 2001

Number of Staff	*Name of Organisation*	*Home Office Dept*	*Grade and Responsibilities*	*Duration*
1	John Lewis	Immigration & Nationality	Grade 7, Team Leader for Asylum Support Unit	Not available
1	Lloyds TSB	Immigration & Nationality	Not available	1 year
2	Not available	Home Office (London)	Not available	Not available

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from non-govenmental organisations in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45226]

Hilary Benn: Secondments are part of the Interchange initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: Voluntary, Education, Health, Public and Private. Interchange provides opportunities for civil servants to learn new skills, widen their experience and develop ideas. It also brings in skills and experiences from other sectors.

For the periods in question, the numbers of staff seconded from non-governmental organisations to the home department are set out in the table. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Non-Governmental Organisations	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Number of staff	30	21

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from the private sector in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45272]

Hilary Benn: Secondments are part of the Interchange initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: Voluntary, Education, Health, Public and Private. Interchange provides opportunities for civil servants to learn new skills, widen their experience and develop ideas. It also brings in skills and experiences from other sectors.

During 1999–2000, three private sector staff are recorded as having been seconded to the home department, with a further four in 2000–01. Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Union Duties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to answer the question of 13 February from the hon. Member for Buckingham regarding staff involvement in union duties. [41578]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 757W.

Regional Organisation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by his Department have a regional organisation; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58937]

Beverley Hughes: The majority of Home Office sponsored Executive Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB's) do not have regional organisations. Some do have offices outside London, but these are not for regional organisational purposes.

The three Executive NDPB's with regional organisation are:

— The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE);

— The National Crime Squad (NCS); and

— The National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS).

Details of their regional organisations are set out in the table.

Both Home Offices Agencies have regional organisations.

Since April 2000, the Prison Service has operated an area manager structure that is based on the Government regions. Two regions are divided between two area managers: the South East (one for Thames Valley, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and one for Kent, Surrey and Sussex) and East Midlands North (Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, Derby and Nottingham) and South (Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, Leicester and Rutland). Previously area managers had been based in London.

The United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) had five regional catchment areas in 1997, and has six in 2002, not including London, which is now a drop in centre. Details of the organisational structure are in the table.

Regional Organisational Structures

A. Home Office Non Departmental Public Bodies

	Commission for Racial Equality (2002)
London and the South (London)	33 London Boroughs Bucks, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Berks., Kent, Bedfordshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex and Hertfordshire.
Midlands (Birmingham)	Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, plus Cambridgeshire (Eastern Region), Shropshire. Northamptonshire. Staffordshire, West Midlands County, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire.
North of England (Manchester and Leeds)	Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire, Manchester, West Yorkshire and Merseyside. Inclusive Boundaries—Northumberland, Durham, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire and East Riding.
Scotland (Edinburgh)	Scotland
Wales (Cardiff)	Wales

Details of the CRE's 1997 organisation structure is not available, although it is believed to have been similar to the 2002 structure.

National Crime Squad (Only became an NDPB in April 2002)

Northern	*Eastern*	*Western*
Cheshire	Bedfordshire	Avon and Somerset
Cleveland	Cambridgeshire	Derbyshire
Cumbria	City of London	Devon and Cornwall
Durham	Essex	Dorset
Greater Manchester	Hampshire	Dyfed-Powys
Humberside	Hertfordshire	Gloucestershire
Lancashire	Kent	Gwent
Merseyside	Metropolitan Police	Leicestershire
Northumbria	Norfolk	Lincolnshire
North Yorkshire	Suffolk	Northamptonshire
South Yorkshire	Surrey	North Wales
West Yorkshire	Sussex	Nottinghamshire
	Thames Valley	South Wales
		Staffordshire
		Warwickshire
		West Mercia
		West Midlands
		Wiltshire

National Criminal Intelligence Service (Only became an NDPB in April 2002)

South East Area Office (London)	Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Greater London, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Surrey, West Sussex, East Sussex, Kent and Isle of Wight.
South West Regional Office (Bristol)	Gloucestershire, Avon, Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Gwent, South Glamorgan, Mid Glamorgan, West Glamorgan and Dyfed, Powys.
Midlands Regional Office (Birmingham)	Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, West Midlands, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Leicestershire, (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire)[1].
North East Regional Office (Wakefield)	South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Humberside, North Yorkshire, Durham, Cleveland, Tyne and Wear, Northumberland, (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire)[1].
North West Regional Office (Manchester)	Cheshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cumbria, Isle of Man, Anglesey, Gwynedd and Clwyd.
Scotland Office (Paisley)	Has responsibility for the whole of Scotland.
Northern Ireland (Belfast)	Has responsibility for Northern Ireland.

[1] Since 1 April 2002, the Midlands Regional Office has extended its responsibilities to include Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire police forces as well as the regional National Crime Squad (NCS) and Her Majesty's Custom's and Excise (HMC&E) offices. These areas of responsibility were previously held by North East Regional Office.

B. Home Office Agencies

	United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) (1997)
Glasgow	All of Scotland, plus Inner and Outer London.
Belfast	Northern Ireland.
Newport	All of Wales, plus Bracknell Forest, Brighton and Hove, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Reading, Slough,

B. Home Office Agencies

	United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) (1997)
	Southampton, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham, Bath and North East Somerset, Bournemouth, Bristol, North Somerset, Plymouth, Poole, S. Gloucestershire, Swindon, Torbay (all unitary authorities) and East Sussex, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey, West Sussex, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Shropshire and Wiltshire (Counties).
Peterborough	East Riding of Yorkshire, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, Leicester, Nottingham, Rutland, Hereford, Stoke-on-Trent, Luton, Peterborough, Southend on Sea, Medway, Milton Keynes (unitary authorities) and Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Worcestershire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Buckinghamshire and Kent.
Liverpool	Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, Blackburn with Darwen, Halton, Warrington, Kingston upon Hull, Derby, Telford and Wrekin (unitary authorities) and Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Derbyshire, and Staffordshire (counties).
UKPS (2002)	
Belfast	All of Northern Ireland plus Brighton and Hove UA and East Sussex.
Durham	Darlington UA, Hartlepool UA, Middlesbrough UA, Redcar and Cleveland UA, Stockton-on-Tees UA, East Riding of Yorkshire UA, Kingston upon Hull UA, North East Lincolnshire UA, North Lincolnshire UA, York UA, Leicester UA, Luton UA, Milton Keynes UA, Nottingham UA, Rutland UA, North Tyneside UA, South Tyneside UA, Sunderland UA, Gateshead UA, Newcastle-upon-Tyne UA, Leeds UA, Bradford UA, Calderdale UA, Kirklees UA, Wakefield UA, Barnsley UA, Sheffield UA, Rotherham UA, Doncaster UA, Coventry UA, Solihull UA, Birmingham UA, Sandwell UA, Dudley UA, Walsall UA, Wolverhampton UA, Bedfordshire, Cumbria, Northumberland, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Durham and Warwickshire.
Glasgow	All of Scotland, plus Medway UA and Kent.
Liverpool	Blackburn with Darwen UA, Wirral UA, Halton UA, Liverpool UA, Knowsley UA, Sefton UA, St Helens UA, Telford and Wrekin UA, Warrington UA, Wigan UA, Salford UA, Bolton UA, Trafford UA, Bury UA, Manchester UA, Stockport UA, Tameside UA, Oldham UA, Rochdale UA, Stoke UA, Derby UA, County of Hereford UA, Cheshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire.
Peterborough	Peterborough UA, Southend-on-Sea UA, Thurrock UA, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey, West Sussex, and Greater London.
Newport	All of Wales, Bracknell Forest UA, Isle of Wight UA, Portsmouth UA, Reading UA, Slough UA, Southampton UA, West Berkshire UA, Windsor and Maidenhead UA, Workingham UA, Bath and North East Somerset UA, Bournemouth UA, City of Bristol UA, North Somerset UA, Plymouth UA, Poole UA, South Gloucestershire UA, Swindon UA, Torbay UA, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, and Wiltshire.

Asylum Accommodation

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum-seeking families with dependent children may have their support removed if they *(a)* refuse the offer of a place in an accommodation centre, *(b)* voluntarily cease to reside there and *(c)* breach conditions set on their residence. [59992]

Beverley Hughes: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of the Department's 2001 staff Christmas Party; and how many people attended. [61668]

Beverley Hughes: Public funds are not normally used to pay for entertainment of civil servants in the Department. Staff Christmas parties in 2001 funded by staff themselves have not been included in this answer. We have identified a small number of events, held in December 2001, to recognise the contribution of staff and extend hospitality to non-civil servants who contributed to the delivery of the Department's objectives during the course of the year, which were part funded by the Department and its operational agencies. The total cost of these was £7,645 attended by 1163 people. We have not trawled the 136 prisons or all Immigration and Nationality Directorate units and to do so could only be done at a disproportionate cost.

Court Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many courts he has visited since 7 June 2001. [64228]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has not visited any courts during this period. However, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley)—then Minister with responsibility for criminal justice policy—visited twelve criminal courts during the corresponding period, and I visited a Magistrates Court.

Recycling

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* paper and *(b)* other goods purchased by his Department was recycled paper in each year since 1997; what the annual total cost of these purchases was; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if he will make a statement. [65772]

Beverley Hughes: (a) The proportion of recycled paper purchased by the Department from the framework paper contract for 2000–01 and 2001–02 is set out in the table. Figures for earlier years are not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Year	Number of reams of recycled paper	Cost of Recycled paper	Total number of reams purchased	Total cost of paper purchased	Percentage of recycled paper purchased
2000–01	12,830	£28,536	556,084	£889,789	2
2001–02	27,230	£85,820	797,212	£1,451,900	3

The Home Office has recently made the use of recycled paper for photocopiers, printers and facsimile equipment compulsory. This mandate applies to the core Home Office and should result in around 40 per cent. of all paper purchased by the Department as a whole being recycled. This percentage may increase shortly: the Prison Service has issued guidance to their procurement staff encouraging them to use recycled paper and the United Kingdom Passport Agency and the Forensic Science Service are at present considering whether to make its use compulsory.

(b) Figures are not available for the proportion of other goods purchased by the Home Office that were derived from recycled paper.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of waste produced in his Department was *(a)* recycled, *(b)* composted and *(c)* re-used, broken down into (i) paper, (ii) plastics, (iii) aluminium cans and (iv) other in each year since 1997; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if he will make a statement. [65701]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, records for the Department's Central London headquarters estate show that 20 per cent. of the office waste was recycled in 2000–01 and 25 per cent. was recycled in 2001–02.

Waste minimisation schemes are being introduced at all key sites on the Department's non-prison estate, while waste audits have been conducted at 72 sites on the prison estate and waste management units are operational at 14 prisons and developmental work is underway at a further 18 sites.

We are considering how to increase the range and amount of waste sent for recycling.

Oral Questions

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many oral questions he has transferred to other departments in each of the last 18 months. [65510]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is shown in the table.

Date of oral PQ session	Number of PQs transferred
2 July 2001	4
19 November 2001	1
4 February 2002	1
11 March 2002	1
TOTAL	7

The reason that there were four transfers in July 2001 is that this closely followed the movement of policy areas between Departments after the General Election. Questions are only transferred out of the Department when it is more appropriate for another Department to respond and when that Department has agreed to accept the question.

Violent Crime

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the rate of violent crime was in each Government-office region at the latest date for which figures are available. [68899]

Mr. Denham: The table gives figures for rates of violent crime from the British Crime Survey (BCS), for the English regions and Wales based on BCS interviews in the financial year 2001–02. The BCS figures for violence per 10,000 adults relate to violence (wounding, common assault, robbery and snatch theft) experienced by the members of the public sampled in the survey.

The BCS violence estimate for the number of violent incidents increased by two per cent. compared to 2000, but this is not statistically significant. Comparison of results reported to the BCS in 2001–02 with those for earlier years show a 17 per cent. decline in BCS violence since 1999, a 22 per cent. decline since 1997 and a 33 per cent. decline since 1995, all of these decreases being statistically significant.

The following figures have been extracted from Table 6.06 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Crime in England and Wales 2001–02", which is available in the library. A fuller explanation of the differences between the collection of recorded crime and BCS figures is given in Chapter 2 of this publication.

The BCS and police recorded crime figures for violence are not directly comparable. Numbers of police recorded violent crimes per 10,000 population relate to all the recordable offences in the violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery offence groups. There is also a less than complete correlation between the recorded crime and BCS figures owing to the different methods of collection, methodology and coverage (for example, the BCS only relates to victims over the age of 16, and residents), with different rates of reporting of crimes to the police also being a factor.

Violent crime recorded by the British Crime Survey by region 2001–02—Rates per 10,000 adults[1]

Region	Total BCS violence per 10,000 adults[1]
North East Region	386
North West Region	736
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	866
East Midlands Region	621
West Midlands Region	579
East of England Region	589
London Region	800
South East Region	895
South West Region	493
Wales	618

Violent crime recorded by the British Crime Survey by region 2001–02—Rates per 10,000 adults[1]

Region	*Total BCS violence per 10,000 adults*[1]
England and Wales	679
England and Wales (excluding London Region)	657

[1] BCS data relates to those of age 16 of over, i.e. about 80 per cent. of the population. (Recorded violent crime figures relate to the whole population).

Capital Modernisation Grant

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown by spending heading of the capital modernisation grant for 2001–02. [68792]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The department spent the following amounts on approved capital modernisation projects in 2001–02:

Project:	*Expenditure £'000*
Round 1	
Crime Reduction Closed Circuit Television	69,127
Airwave	28,300
IT Integration in criminal justice system (CJS) with Lord Chancellor's Department and the Crown Prosecution Service: Oasys and P.S. Lids System	476
DNA database (with Round 2)	17,000
Active Communities	7,604
Libra	98
VISOR—Sex and Violent Offenders Database	333
Round 2	
Prison Pressures	Nil *
National Strategy on Police Information System	12,188
Government Technical Assistance Centre	4,840
Video recording police interviews	1,706
Video-links: Modernising the Court Process	2,422
Post-release support hostel for prisoners after drug treatment	Nil *
Electronic chipping of goods	1,539
Visor—Sex and Violent Offenders Database	333
Round 3	
Firearms Forensic Database	Nil *
Joined Up Justice—Integrated CJS for Warwickshire	2,700
Security for small retailers	2,354
Detecting Concealed People	935
Electronic chipping of goods	700

* Deferred to 2002–03.

Rape

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to lower the statutory age at which a person can be prosecuted for rape. [69756]

Hilary Benn: None. The statutory age at which a person can be prosecuted for rape is 10 (which is also the age of criminal responsibility). The age was lowered from 14 to 10 by the Sexual Offences Act 1993.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's methodology for recording crime statistics; and when this methodology was last changed. [71013]

Mr. Denham: Police practice on recorded crime statistics has for many years been governed by Home Office Counting Rules. These rules have covered the counting and classification of crimes for statistical purposes, although the policy on whether to record crimes that have been reported has in the past varied from force to force.

The Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime were last revised with effect from 1 April 2002, principally to take account of the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard which was produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in consultation with the Home Office. The Standard aims to promote greater consistency between police forces in recording reports of crime and to take a more victim orientated approach to crime recording.

The latest change to the Rules is anticipated to impact mainly on the violence against the person, theft and handling and criminal damage offence groups, although all offence groups are potentially affected and the impact of the changes will vary between the different police forces.

The recorded crime statistics cover all indictable and triable-either-way offences, together with a few summary offences closely related to more serious ones.

A copy of the Home Office Counting Rules is available on the website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/counting/index.html.

CCTV

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms are used for monitoring the usefulness and effectiveness of CCTV programmes. [71651]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Initiative, a potential of £170 million will be spent funding 683 public area CCTV schemes.

As a condition of funding, each scheme is required to undertake an independent evaluation of its effectiveness as a tool to assist the police and reduce crime and the fear of crime. These evaluations will cover implementation, impact and cost effectiveness.

In addition, to help ensure maximum impact and sustainability of CCTV, a £1.5 million Home Office funded national evaluation programme is being carried out by the Scarman Centre, University of Leicester, on 17 approved CCTV Initiative schemes.

Attendance Centres

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the reform of attendance centres; [71486]

(2) what plans he has to change responsibility for *(a)* junior and *(b)* senior attendance centres with the youth justice system. [71485]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The Youth Justice Board has had central responsibility for commissioning and funding junior attendance centres since April 2000. We are, in consultation with the Board, reviewing existing arrangements.

Overstayers

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 88W, on overstayers, what steps he plans to take to increase the rate of consideration and decision on applications under the Regularisation Scheme for Overstayers to meet his target date of April 2003. [71681]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* During the current financial year there has been a significant increase in the number of specialist caseworkers considering the applications under The Regularisation Scheme For Overstayers. The new staff are initially dealing with grants (which are easier to process) until they receive further training in September. It is expected that the output of the established staff will continue to increase with experience, and that the new staff will quickly come up to speed. Processes have been streamlined, best practice shared, and a pragmatic and sympathetic approach is being taken to any compassionate factors encountered. Processes and resources will be kept under constant review, and caseworkers are encouraged to make any suggestions for improvements in working practices that might further speed up decision making.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for how long he retains documents referred to in Parliamentary Answers on his Department's website; [72268]

(2) whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website. [72272]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office aims to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon. Members' Questions. Where it is helpful to refer hon. Members to other documents as part of the substantive reply, this may be done by making hard copies of documents available in the Libraries of the House, or by reference to material available on the Home Office website. The Home Office adheres to the requirements for the types of documents which should be published on our website as directed by the Office of the e-Envoy. A copy of these is available at http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/webguidelines.htm.

The Home Office ensures that the content of the site as a whole is up to date and current.

There are no set time limits for documents to remain on the Home Office website. Where it is agreed with particular policy units that documents are no longer current but still of significant interest, the relevant material is archived and available to website users on www.homeoffice.gov.uk/archive.htm. Consultation documents are archived on the site after their closing date under www.homeoffice.gov.uk/atoz/cpsummaries.htm.

Sangatte Refugee Centre

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the arrangements made with the French Interior Minister for the closure of the Sangatte Red Cross refugee centre include, and if future arrangements made will include, *(a)* a right of appeal of immigration decisions taken in respect of the residents of the centre and *(b)* the provision of independent legal advice to the residents of the centre; and if he will make a statement. [72485]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's discussions with his French counterpart have concentrated on agreeing a closure timetable for the Sangatte Centre and the range of measures to tackle illegal immigration which will allow the centre to close.

Travel Documents

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what measures the UK Government are taking to encourage the recognition of *(a)* the Convention travel document issued to refugees and *(b)* certificates of identity issued by the UK as official travel documents by countries that do not recognise them as such; and if he will make a statement; [72483]

(2) which countries recognise *(a)* the Convention travel document issued to refugees and *(b)* certificates of identity issued by the UK as official travel documents, and if he will make a statement; [72482]

(3) what measures he is taking to facilitate the travel to countries who do not recognise the Convention travel document issued to refugees and certificates of identity issued by the UK as official travel documents by UK residents who hold such documents; and if he will make a statement; [72484]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* All countries which are signatories of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees recognise the travel document issued to refugees under Article 28 of the Convention. We are not aware of any particular difficulties encountered by refugees resident in the United Kingdom when using this travel document.

The Certificate of Identity (CID) is a travel document issued to foreign nationals who are resident here but unable to obtain a passport from their national authorities. It is issued on a discretionary basis, not under an international convention. Non-recognition of the document by a number of European Union Member States who are members of the Schengen Group, notably France, Germany, Greece and Spain, means that CID holders who want to travel abroad for short visits, or other temporary purposes, are often unable to do so. It is a matter for individual countries whether the CID is recognised as a travel document.

The issue has been discussed regularly at meetings of consular representatives from the London Embassies of the Schengen Member States. At these meetings, and also in separate informal discussions, Home Office officials have given extensive assurances about matters relating to the CID, including particularly the re-admissibility to the UK of people who use the document to travel abroad.

Efforts to solve the problem and persuade objecting countries to recognise the CID are continuing.

Police (Ethnic Minority Gender Targets)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of introducing ethnic minority gender targets for the police. [9390]

Mr. Denham: There are no current plans to introduce such targets. The Government has published overall targets for the recruitment, retention and progression of minority ethnic police officers in "Dismantling Barriers". Forces have until 2009 to meet those targets. It remains a priority for the Government that the police service should represent the communities it serves.

Crime (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of crime prevention partnerships in reducing crime in the Buckingham constituency. [22628]

Mr. Denham: The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the responsible authorities—police and local authorities—for each area jointly to conduct an audit of all crime and disorder and in the light of that and following local consultation, to formulate and implement a crime and disorder reduction strategy. In so doing, they must involve other local agencies, and the local community. The Act also requires the responsible authorities to keep the strategy under review to monitor its effectiveness.

The Buckingham constituency falls within the Aylesbury Vale Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). The Partnership has conducted an audit of crime and disorder in their area to inform their strategy for crime and disorder reduction for Aylesbury Vale for the period April 2002 to April 2005. This strategy was published in April 2002.

Latest recorded crime figures published in July 2002 for the 12-month period to March 2002 are set out in the table, along with comparisons for the previous two years. British Crime Survey (BCS) figures are not available at CDRP or Basic Command Unit (BCU) level, but figures for 2001–02 do show significant national reductions in the key categories of crime over the two years since the last BCS with a large enough sample size to demonstrate trends (1999): burglary fell by 23 per cent.; vehicle thefts fell by 14 per cent.; common assaults fell by 28 per cent.; vandalism fell by six per cent.; and overall crime fell by 14 per cent. The BCS also demonstrates that the chances of being a victim of crime remain stable at their lowest level for nearly twenty years. In the South East region, the BCS shows that burglary and vehicle crime levels are well below the national average, although the same cannot be said for violent crime.

Aylesbury Vale Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

	Number of offences		
Recorded Crime	*2001–02*	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*
Violence against the person	970	1,016	842
Sexual offences	57	68	70
Robbery	147	133	58
Burglary dwelling	779	533	622
Theft of motor vehicle	523	540	604
Theft from a motor vehicle	1,925	2,076	2,054

Domestic Violence

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a process to ensure that *(a)* criminal justice agencies, *(b)* social services departments and *(c)* others can learn the lessons from those cases where a victim of domestic violence has subsequently been murdered by her abuser. [18646]

Mr. Denham: There are a number of processes already in place to ensure all relevant agencies learn from cases where domestic violence culminates in murder, and measures are currently underway to try and minimise the likelihood of such a tragic event.

In the event of a victim of domestic violence being murdered by her abuser, where the local police had prior contact or knowledge of the abuse, an internal police review should routinely be undertaken to consider the force's processes and identify failings. Such a review will report to the Chief Officer and will contain recommendations as to what processes are required to ensure that such a crime is not allowed to happen.

Tragically, children can also be the victims of murder following domestic violence. Chapter 8 of the Government's "Working Together to Safeguard Children" child protection guidance details the process by which Area Child Protection Committees can institute a serious case review into cases where a child dies and abuse or neglect are known or suspected to be a factor in the death. During such reviews, the agencies involved—the Police, Social Services, Education and Health Services—prepare reports of their involvement with the case. The final report then considers whether there are any lessons to be learned from the tragedy about the ways in which agencies work together to safeguard children, and the involvement between the family and relevant professionals.

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) are also currently piloting domestic violence murder reviews in cases that do not necessarily involve children, based on the same model as that just set out. Such reviews involve the key agencies and ensure an appropriate forum exists to take forward any recommendations that may prevent further homicides. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is awaiting the results of the MPS pilots before requiring all forces to follow similar procedures.

Further, the Solicitor General has asked the Crown Prosecution Service to carry out multi-agency domestic violence murder reviews in a number of recent cases. These reviews, and those conducted by the MPS seek to predict the risk factors where domestic violence is occurring and improve risk management.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which voluntary organisations he has consulted on his policy on domestic violence; and when he last met representatives from Refuge to discuss this issue. [71843]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office has consulted many voluntary sector organisations, and will continue to do so, on the policy of domestic violence. Officials from the Home Office and others from the Inter-Departmental Group on Domestic Violence also attend the Women's National Commission (WNC) Violence against Women Working Group which is made up of different voluntary sector organisations and projects working to combat domestic violence.

Organisations participating include Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE), Refuge, Standing Together, Womankind Worldwide, Greater London Domestic Violence Project (GLDVP), Camden DV/Rape Crisis, IMKAAN, SERICC, Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid, Victim Support, Southall Black Sisters.

The Home Secretary has not held any meetings with Refuge to discuss domestic violence policy. My hon. Friend, Barbara Roche, Minister for Women, and also a member of the Home Office-led Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence with responsibility for education and awareness raising, has met their representatives very recently.

Police

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement regarding the minimum level of police cover allowed when overtime is managed down. [44025]

Mr. Denham: On 9 May 2002, the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) agreed a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service. The PNB is the statutory negotiating body for police pay and conditions throughout the United Kingdom.

As part of a package of reforms, there will be a scheme to manage down overtime, with a service-wide target of a 15 per cent. reduction in the overtime bill over the three years from 2003–04. There will be local targets, taking account of force strength and effective management action already taken to manage down the overtime bill.

Achievement of the target will not be at the expense of police officer operational availability.

The scheme for managing down overtime will be complemented by the efficient and effective deployment of officers. The Inspectorate will monitor both the increased availability of officers for frontline duties and the managing down of overtime. Forces should be able to keep any savings achieved dependent on achieving improved visibility and availability, which will allow opportunities for increasing establishment or other initiatives designed to further improve visibility or availability.

The new pay and conditions package agreed on 9 May will provide a modernised pay structure rewarding those at the sharp end and reducing reliance on overtime. In so doing, it both underpins the rest of the police reform programme and demonstrates the Government's commitment to invest in the police service to achieve the reforms needed and to give it the support and flexibility it requires to deliver a first-class service to the public.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how much the amount of premium pay for overtime and roster rest day working will be reduced; and what this figure is in cash terms. [44024]

Mr. John Denham: On 9 May 2002, the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) agreed a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service. The PNB is the statutory negotiating body for police pay and conditions throughout the United Kingdom.

Under the PNB Agreement, the rates of premium pay for overtime and rostered rest days are not being reduced.

Under the Agreement, there will be a scheme to manage down overtime, with a service-wide target of a 15 per cent. reduction in the overtime bill over the three years from 2003–04.

Achievement of the target will not be at the expense of the police officer operational availability. The scheme for managing down overtime will be complemented by the efficient and effective deployment of officers. The Inspectorate will monitor both the increased availability of officers for frontline duties and the managing down of overtime. Forces should be able to keep any savings achieved, dependent on achieving improved visibility and availability, which will allow opportunities for increasing establishment or other initiatives designed to further improve visibility or availability.

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Yarl's Wood Detention Centre

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people who were detained at Yarl's Wood Detention Centre at the time of the fire on 14 February have since been removed from the UK; [52959]

(2) when he expects the search of Yarl's Wood site to be completed; and if evidence has been discovered during the search of human remains. [52960]

Beverley Hughes: The immigration and asylum applications and appeals of those held at Yarl's Wood removal centre on 14 February have continued to be processed in the normal way. This will include the removal or deportation of individuals who reach the point where they no longer have any lawful basis to remain in this country. The number of persons removed or deported could be established only by an examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

I understand that Bedfordshire Police have completed their controlled clearance of the Yarl's Wood site and that the forensic examination of the material removed continues. No evidence of fatalities has been discovered to date.

Harmondsworth Retention Centre

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* attempted suicides there have been at the Immigration Holding Centre at Harmondsworth in each of the last five years. [56130]

Beverley Hughes: Central records are not maintained specifically for suicide attempts by individuals held under Immigration Act powers. Information is, however, maintained on actual self-inflicted deaths. There has been one such incident. This occurred in January 2000 at Harmondsworth.

Anti-Semitic Attacks

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will collect statistics on the numbers of anti-semitic attacks. [57625]

Beverley Hughes: The Government has no plans to collect separate statistics on anti-Semitic attacks. These cases will be included in the total figures for racist incidents and in the statistics on racially or religiously aggravated crimes. The "Code of Practice on Reporting and Recording Racist Incidents—In response to recommendation 15 of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report", lists the minimum data content for recording racist incidents by the police and other agencies. This data content includes the religion of the victim and the type of incident. The Government also receives statistics from other sources including reports of anti-Semitic incidents from the Jewish community itself.

Street Crime

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reasons underlying the recent increase in street crime in England. [56238]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Crime overall has fallen in recent years and the chances of becoming a victim of crime are at their lowest for 20 years. However, by contrast street crime—i.e. robberies, snatch thefts—has shown a sharp increase, particularly over the last year.

Tackling street crime is now a top priority for the government, which announced a programme of action on 17 March 2002.

The government recognises that street crime has social and economic causes that cannot be tackled by the police and criminal justice agencies alone. That is why this strategy brings together all agencies, all departments, and all systems that impact on young people at risk from crime, at risk of offending, and offenders themselves and to work together to more effectively tackle street crime.

The work aims to reverse the upward trend before looking to bring about sustainable reductions in the long-term.

This means tackling persistent offenders, speeding up the criminal justice system and giving a better service for victims and witnesses.

We need to tackle the roots of the problem by getting to children before they become involved in crime. This means tackling truancy, young people excluded from school should not be left to roam the streets. And from September we are providing for all permanently excluded pupils to have access to full-time education. We are also supporting the placement of up to 100 police officers in schools most affected by crime.

We are also providing constructive activities to keep children out of trouble during school holidays with an additional £12 million for Summer Splash schemes.

It is also part of our strategy on drugs to break the link between drugs and crime.

Finally, we are supporting the work of the mobile phone industry to put stolen phones—a key factor in the rise in street crime—out of use by legislating to ban the re-programming of mobile phones.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mobile telephone thefts there were, broken down by police force area, in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [72088]

Mr. Denham: Centrally the Home Office does not collect or collate statistics on mobile phone thefts.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the proportion of street robberies that involved mobile telephone theft in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [72089]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office does not centrally collect or collate statistics on the number of mobile phone thefts and individual police forces do not routinely collect such figures either, although some do for their own purposes. We cannot therefore estimate the proportion of street robberies that involved mobile phone theft in the last 12 months.

However, a Home Office Report on "Mobile Phone Theft" published in January 2002 estimated that in 2000–01 mobile phones were stolen in 28 per cent. of all robberies.

The Government has made significant progress in working with the mobile phone industry and the police to tackle mobile phone theft. From the end of September, network operators will be able to bar stolen handsets across all networks by reference to the unique International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number. To complement this measure, the Government has passed the Mobile Telephones (Re-programming) Bill which creates new criminal offences of unauthorised re-programming of the IMEI number and possessing, supplying or offering to supply equipment for that purpose. We are continuing to press the industry to put in place a long-term strategy to enhance the security of 3G devices.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reasons

for the change in crime levels in Avon and Somerset over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [56537]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The most recently published recorded crime figures show that in the 12 months to March 2002, overall crime levels in Avon and Somerset rose by 20 per cent. Although drug offences fell by 7 per cent. during this period, Avon and Somerset saw rises in the other major categories of crime. The most significant increase was a 77 per cent. rise in robbery. This is why the Government launched the Street Crime Initiative in April of this year, which covers the 10 Police Force areas with the worst robbery problem—including Avon and Somerset. The initiative builds new measures on top of plans which were already in progress to ensure co-ordinated action across all parts of Government to bring street robbers to swift and effective justice.

The National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS), which was introduced in Avon and Somerset and several other forces in April 2001, and in all forces in April 2002, has contributed to changing levels of recorded crime. Across England and Wales, the NCRS, along with other changes to police recording practices, has had the effect of increasing recorded crime statistics by at least five per cent. this year, which suggest that crime levels have only increased by two per cent. In Avon and Somerset it has caused an uplift of 10 per cent. It is expected to have an even more marked effect on next year's crime statistics (an estimated uplift of 15–20 per cent.).

The new standard aims to promote greater consistency between police forces in the recording of crime. Every police force must record all incidents, whether reported by victims, witnesses or third parties, and whether crime-related or not. This will result in the registration of an incident report by the police. Following the initial registration, an incident will be recorded as a crime (notifiable offence) if the circumstances as reported amount to a crime defined by law, and if there is no credible evidence to the contrary. As a result, incidents which previously may not have been recorded, are being included in subsequent crime statistics. The effect has been most marked nationally in relation to violence against the person where a five per cent. fall has been turned into an eight per cent. rise by the effects of greater levels of recording by the police.

Departmental Police (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35602]

Mr. Denham: We are not able to provide statistical information for the effects of our policies prior to 2 May 1997 as this would amount to disproportionate cost.

Brislington schools have been given approximately £89,000 for a schools' initiative. This will tackle issues through running "Coping with Teenagers" training for parents, a peer mentoring programme, 10 week Consequences of Crime course for those "at risk", a Lessons Withdrawal programme for those who would have been excluded and installing a new non-attendance computer system.

Further funding has been granted for various Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) initiatives. The Kingsdown Estate has received over £257,000 for a partnership between the council, police and local residents to target an urban residential area with three tower blocks by providing additional 26 cameras to an existing system. The objectives of this scheme are to reduce fear of crime, improve personal and building security, reduce graffiti, vandalism, criminal damage and vehicle crime and improve communication and response of police patrols in the area. Further CCTV schemes have been set up in Symes, St. Paul's and St. Jude's. These form part of an integrated package to reduce drug-trading, fear of crime and prostitution.

Several schemes have been set up under the Reducing Burglary Initiative in Knowle Estate, Hartcliffe (North and South), St. Agnes, Cromwell and Upper Easton. These involve providing additional window locks, "Dawn to Dusk" lighting, improved fencing and promotion of Neighbourhood Watch schemes. A significant amount of resources will placed into target hardening and measures are to be adopted to reduce repeat victimisation, improve offender detection, raise public awareness of crime prevention issues and provide research, rehabilitation and diversion of offenders. There will be interagency working including the police, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and Age Concern. Follow up schemes are planned to gather feedback from local agencies and offenders. Offenders will also be referred to drug rehabilitation.

The City of Bristol will receive a minimum of £1.6 million over the next two years for a Communities Against Drugs programme. The funding is delivered through a plan agreed between the Drug Action Team, the Crime and Disorder Partnership and Local Authority. The intentions of this scheme are to disrupt drugs markets; tackle drug related crime and strengthen communities to resist drugs.

Bristol is now operating an Intensive Surveillance and Supervision Programme (ISSP). ISSP is the most rigorous, non-custodial intervention available for young offenders to tackle their offending behaviour. There are 41 schemes operating nationally targeting 2,500 of the most prolific young offenders a year at an annual cost of £15 million. When fully operational it will have the capacity to deal with 25 young offenders at any one time—50 in a year. Currently there are three people on the scheme. The programmes are managed and funded by the Youth Justice Board and the Bristol scheme has been awarded a grant of over £895,000.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk). The Annual Report for 2001–02 has now been published and can also be found under the same website.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the programme of exchange, training and co-operation between law enforcement

authorities (OISIN) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58450]

(2) what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the incentive, exchange, training and co-operation programme for the prevention of crime (Hippocrates) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58449]

(3) what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the programme of incentives and exchanges for legal practitioners (Grotius general and criminal) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58446]

(4) what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the incentive, exchange, training and co-operation programme for combating trade in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children (STOP) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58447]

(5) what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Joint Action establishing a programme of exchanges, training and co-operation for persons responsible for action to combat organised crime (Falcone) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58448]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Falcone, Hippocrates, Grotius criminal, Oisin II and STOP II Committees assist the European Commission in the management and implementation of programmes which co-fund projects to promote knowledge of and skills in combating organised crime (Falcone) and the prevention of crime (Hippocrates); to promote knowledge of Member States' legal and judicial systems and facilitate co-operation in criminal matters (Grotius criminal); to develop and enhance co-operation between police, customs and other national law enforcement authorities through exchanges, training courses and seminars (Oisin II); and to encourage practical co-operation between the persons responsible for action against the trade in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children in the Member States (STOP II).

Each Committee normally meets twice a year, initially to agree the annual work programme and criteria for evaluating and selecting bids for funding, and subsequently to discuss the bids which have been received and agree the allocation of funds to successful projects.

The UK is represented on each Committee by a Home Office official and an official from the UK Permanent Representation in Brussels. A representative from Her Majesty's Customs and Exercise also occasionally attends the Oisin II Committee when appropriate.

The programmes are funded by the European Community budget and travel costs to attend Committee meetings are met by the European Commission. However, the Home Office (and HM Customs as appropriate) pays a subsistence allowance to cover attendance at a Committee meeting.

The committees met on 22 and 23 July to agree the successful bids for funding for 2002.

The Commission is required to prepare annual reports on the implementation of the programmes which are submitted to the Council and European Parliament. The reports are also published on the EUROPA Internet website. I do not see a need for further measures to increase the Committees' accountability and transparency.

The Council is currently negotiating a new funding programme which will replace Falcone, Hippocrates, Grotius criminal, Oisin II and STOP II when they expire at the end of 2002. The creation of one programme should streamline the current administration process and therefore reduce costs. It will also allow the European Commission and Member States to have a broad overview of all the projects which are submitted for funding in the field of criminal law and crime prevention and consequently take a more strategic approach in selecting which projects to assist.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South of 17 April, reference number 51632, on guidelines on sex abuse cases; and if he will make a statement. [65749]

Mr. Denham: With apologies for the delay in responding I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1489W.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South of 22 May, ref. 58561, on police officers in Portsmouth; and if he will make a statement. [65745]

Mr. Denham: With apologies for the delay in responding I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 18 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 561W.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the written question from the hon. Member for Chichester, tabled on 22 May, on the official travel of departmental and non-departmental special advisors. [72684]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary replied to the hon. Member on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1494W.

Entitlement Identity Card

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will define the rigorous procedures to check *(a)* access to information and *(b)* protection from unauthorised access referred to in paragraph 1.3 of his consultation document on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud; [72105]

(2) what non-Governmental partners he plans will use the proposed entitlement identity card; and whether they will contribute revenue to the running costs of the card; [72114]

(3) what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* a full cost-benefit analysis of an entitlement identity card scheme and *(b)* a proper risk assessment of the challenges posed by the procurement and roll-out, as referred to in Cmnd 5557; [72109]

(4) what checks he plans the issuing authority for a proposed entitlement identity card to make with the banking sector; and what exchanges of information are proposed; [72120]

(5) if he will list the organisations *(a)* to which he has sent a copy of the consultation paper on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud (Cmnd 5557) and *(b)* from which he has specifically requested views; [72103]

(6) what assessment he has made of the disadvantages of a non-compulsory, non-universal entitlement identity card; [72106]

(7) whether he plans that the proposed entitlement identity card would allow the *(a)* police and *(b)* paramedics and hospital staff access to medical records maintained on the smartcard; [72118]

(8) whether he plans that fingerprint records used in a proposed entitlement identity card would be available to the police; [72117]

(9) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* universal and *(b)* voluntary entitlement identity cards which will be (i) lost and (ii) stolen per annum; [72158]

(10) if he will define the term core personal information used in paragraph 1.3 of his consultation document on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud; and if he will list the particulars. [72104]

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, made a statement to the House on 3 July, announcing the publication of a consultation paper on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud. The consultation period will last until 10 January 2002. The Government has made it clear that the introduction of an entitlement card would be a major step and that it would not proceed without consulting widely and considering all the views expressed very carefully.

One of the purposes of the consultation exercise is to identify potential partners. Views are welcomed in the consultation paper from organisations providing services in the public and private sectors on whether they would like to link services to a card scheme and what features they would want to see in a scheme that would most benefit their services. The consultation paper also discusses sharing revenue generated by potential partners' use of a card scheme to cover some of the costs of setting up and administrating a card scheme. If such an arrangement could be agreed, this would reduce the fees charged for entitlement cards.

There are no plans to hold medical records on entitlement cards. The consultation paper discusses holding, at the cardholder's consent, a limited amount of medical information that could be used in an emergency, for example, current medical information on allergies.

There are no plans for the issuing authority for any entitlement card to make checks with the banking sector.

The set up and issuing costs for a universal scheme outlined in the consultation paper are based on the costs of building on the driving licence and passport systems extrapolated to cover all of the resident population. There is no separate estimate for a voluntary scheme.

It is not possible to estimate how many people would apply for an entitlement card as opposed to an entitlement card issued in the form of a photocard driving licence or a passport card. On the assumption that those who do not hold driving licences and passports at present all opt for an entitlement card and that these cards would be lost or stolen at the same rate as driving licences were in 2000–01 (which is the latest date for which complete figures are available), it is estimated that 424,000 cards would be reported as lost or stolen each year once a scheme was fully implemented.

A list of those organisations to which copies of the consultation paper have been or are in the process of being sent has been placed in the Library.

The Government has invited views from all of these organisations. We intend to contact other appropriate organisations as they are suggested to us.

The consultation paper requests views on what information should be held in any central register which might be used to administer a card scheme and what information should be displayed or stored on the card itself.

The proposed central register and entitlement card/driving licence would hold core personal information necessary to administer an effective scheme. The information to be held on the card and in the register would include the holder's name; date and place of birth; residential address; validity dates of card(s) and issuing authority; digitised image of signature; photograph; National Insurance number; driver number; a unique personal number; nationality; sex; employment status; and possibly biometric information.

The central register would also include cross references to other personal identifiers used in schemes linked to the entitlement card such as passport number and driver number. It might also include any secret password, pass phrase or PIN used to help authenticate transactions if it was decided to incorporate such a facility in a card scheme.

The consultation paper invites views on what specific measures should be included in any entitlement card scheme to ensure compatibility with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998.

The consultation paper goes into detail about how a scheme would comply with all eight principles. Paragraphs 6.15 and 6.16 of the consultation paper discuss compliance

with the Sixth and Seventh Principles of the Data Protection Act. The Sixth Principle stipulates that personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of data subjects under the Act. The Seventh Principle stipulates that appropriate technical and organisational measures shall be taken against unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data and against accidental loss or destruction of, or damage to, personal data.

The procedures adopted for any entitlement card scheme would build on the experience and expertise of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the UK Passport Service, both of which have a great deal of experience in administering large databases of personal information, including where they are administered by a third party under contract. Both are well placed to develop detailed procedures to comply with the requirements of the Seventh Principle should the Government decide to implement a scheme in this way.

Paragraph 2.9 of the consultation paper assesses the disadvantages of a non-compulsory, non-universal entitlement card scheme. Such a voluntary scheme could not guarantee complete coverage of the population, service providers would need to support different ways of checking the entitlement of the people they served. Benefits for a scheme would therefore be lower than for a scheme where everyone was required to have a card. Those people most likely to benefit from a simple, straightforward means of asserting their rights and entitlements may well be amongst the least likely to apply for a voluntary one. Unless all of society were to hold one, the protections a card scheme could afford to the broader community would be reduced or eliminated.

The costs of a full cost- benefit analysis of an entitlement card scheme, and of a proper risk assessment of the challenges of the procurement and roll-out cannot be determined until a decision is taken on what type of scheme, if any, the Government intend to proceed with. This will not be decided until the views received during the consultation exercise have been carefully analysed.

There are no firm plans to use fingerprints in an entitlement card scheme. The consultation paper discusses the inclusion of biometric information as part of a scheme and fingerprinting is one of the options. In its discussion of the possible use of fingerprints, the paper explains that it would not be necessary to record fingerprints to the same standard used by the police. For example, there would not be a need to identify people using partial fingerprint records such as those retrieved from crime scenes.

Paragraph 3.29 of the consultation document discusses whether the police should have access to any biometric information, such as fingerprints, held on the entitlement card database. Most offenders are already known to the police, who have their own biometric databases of fingerprints and DNA which are more sophisticated than anything envisaged for an entitlement card scheme. It may also cause public unease and a lack of confidence in an entitlement card scheme if the police were to have routine access. However, there may be cases in very closely prescribed circumstances, such as in matters of national security, or the prevention or detection of very serious crimes, where the police might have access to the information. Specific views on this issue are sought in the consultation paper, point 15 (iii).

Drugs Possession

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were *(a)* arrested and *(b)* charged with possession of Class (i) A, (ii) B and (iii) C drugs in the West Somerset Division of Avon and Somerset Police in each year since 1997. [73263]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Arrest data are only available centrally for all drug offences as a whole, not for individual types of offences, so it is not possible to provide the level of detail requested. The figures given in the table relate to persons referred to courts in the West Somerset Division by the police for unlawful possession of drugs, and also to those found guilty of such offences.

Table: Number of persons referred to courts for and found guilty of offences of unlawful possession of drugs, West Somerset, 1997–2000

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Class A				
Referred to court	2	4	2	1
Found guilty	2	4	2	1
Class B				
Referred to court	1	2	3	2
Found guilty	1	2	3	2
Class C				
Referred to court	0	0	0	0
Found guilty	0	0	0	0

Source:
Drugs and Alcohol Research

Drug Dealing (Lambeth)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made in Lambeth for *(a)* dealing in cannabis and *(b)* dealing in class A drugs in each of the last 12 months for which figures are available. [73218]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information requested is in the tables. It has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Table 1: Number of arrests made in Lambeth for dealing in cannabis

Month	*Unlawful importation*	*Possession with intent to supply unlawfully*	*Unlawful supply*	*Total*
July 2001	0	3	0	3
August 2001	0	6	3	9
September 2001	0	6	3	9
October 2001	0	3	2	5
November 2001	0	3	0	3
December 2001	0	2	2	4
January 2002	0	4	1	5
February 2002	0	5	2	7
March 2002	0	3	1	4
April 2002	0	0	2	2
May 2002	0	5	1	6
June 2002	0	5	3	8
Total	0	45	20	65

Source:
Metropolitan Police Service.

Table 2: Total of arrests made in Lambeth for dealing in Class A drugs

Month	Unlawful importation	Possession with intent to supply unlawfully	Unlawful supply	Total
July 2001	0	4	41	45
August 2001	0	3	6	9
September 2001	0	3	4	7
October 2001	0	4	3	7
November 2001	0	7	1	8
December 2001	0	7	2	9
January 2002	0	7	1	8
February 2002	0	9	2	11
March 2002	0	12	8	20
April 2002	0	5	2	7
May 2002	2	5	34	41
June 2002	0	10	7	17
Total	2	76	111	189

Source:
Metropolitan Police Service.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve the service for people who attempt to use the Immigration and Nationality Directorate hotline. [72403]

Beverley Hughes: In the last six months, calls answered by the Immigration and Nationality Enquiry Bureau have increased by a third resulting in an average in excess of 21,000 calls a week. This has been attributed to the introduction of new staff (brought in via a regular recruitment programme) and to the new computerised telephone system, which is helping to manage the queues more effectively by giving the answers to commonly asked questions whilst callers are queuing.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered letters have been lost when sent out from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in Croydon in the last 12 months. [72402]

Beverley Hughes: Over the period June 2001 to June 2002, 119 claims for compensation were made against the Royal Mail for Recorded Delivery items sent out by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in Croydon, but not delivered.

Terrorism

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the ethical guidelines that will be followed in respect of co-operation with EU National Anti-Terrorist Evaluation Teams. [72159]

Mr. Blunkett: Article 6 of the draft EU Council Decision for establishing a mechanism for evaluating the legal systems and their implementation at national level in the fight against terrorism (8811/2/02) states that the visits of the evaluation teams established under the Decision would be arranged by the Member State. Any visits arranged to the United Kingdom would be entirely in accordance with longstanding policy and codes of behaviour in relation to matters of national security and our national law, including the Official Secrets Act 1989. Article 9 of the draft Decision requires the evaluation teams to respect the confidentiality of any information they receive in connection with their task.

Child Pornography

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts regarding tackling the distribution of child pornography on a European-wide scale; and what proposals were examined. [72526]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Member States of the European Union have been negotiating since January 2000 on a draft Framework Decision concerning the harmonisation of national laws in respect of the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. The Instrument will require Member States to adopt common definitions and minimum penalties in relation to the possession, acquisition, production and distributing of child pornography. It has been on the agenda for discussion at JHA Councils on 27–28 September and 6–7 December 2001; and 25–26 April and 13–14 June 2002.

On-line child pornography was also discussed at the meeting of G8 Justice and Interior Ministers in May. Ministers commissioned the relevant experts to: explore the creation of an international database to help locate victims and identified and apprehend perpetrators; and to implement a G8 strategy involving improved international co-operation; prevention; strengthened co-operation among law enforcement, industry, and civil society groups; public awareness; and outreach to other countries.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been convicted of producing and possessing child pornography in the last year for which figures are available. [72523]

Hilary Benn: Convictions for producing child pornography are not directly identifiable on the Home Office Court Proceedings database.

The available information relates to possessing, taking or making indecent photographs, or pseudo-photographs, of children under the Protection of Children Act 1978 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988 or for possessing obscene material for gain under the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

This is contained in the table and relates to England and Wales in 2000.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in the autumn.

Number of persons convicted at all courts for offences relating to pornography England and Wales 2000[1,2]

Offence	Statute	Total convicted
Possessing obscene material for gain	Obscene Publications Act 1959 S. 2 as amended by the Obscene Publications Act, 1964 Sec. 1	81
Take or to make indecent photographs, or pseudo-photographs,	Protection of Children Act 1978 Sections 1, 6 as amended by the	218

Number of persons convicted at all courts for offences relating to pornography England and Wales 2000[1,2]

Offence	*Statute*	*Total convicted*
of children	Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 Sec. 84	
Possession of an indecent photograph, or pseudo-photograph, of a child	Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1988 Sec. 160 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 Secs. 84 (4) and 86 (1)	77

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates' courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter of 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust at a detailed level and so are excluded from this analysis.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been taken since 1997 to prevent the distribution of child pornography. [72522]

Hilary Benn: The Government is determined to tackle child pornography whether on or off line and the criminal law applies equally to both.

In January 2001 we raised the maximum penalties for taking, making, distributing or showing indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children to 10 years imprisonment (from three years), and the maximum penalty for simple possession of such material to five years (from six months). Also in 2001 we made the importation of indecent or obscene material a serious arrestable offence to allow Customs and Excise officers and the police greater powers in investigating child pornography offences.

In response to concerns about the availability of child pornography on the Internet, a hotline for reporting this and other potentially illegal material was established by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) an industry funded organisation, in December 1996. Since its inception over 40,000 items of child pornography have been removed by Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in response to the notice and take down procedure. The IWF also sends details to the police, or, since the majority of child pornography originates outside the United Kingdom, to the enforcement agency of the country concerned, via the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS). In February 2002, the IWF extended its policy, recommending to ISPs that they do not carry newsgroups which have been identified as regularly hosting child pornography or those with names that appear to advertise child pornography.

In November 2000, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, announced a £25 million investment in the police over three years specifically to fight hi-tech crime and to enhance the capability of the police at a national and local level to investigate computer related offences, including the possession and distribution of illegal pornography. This included the setting up last year of a National High Tech Crime Unit within the National Crime Squad as a centre of excellence, which has already mounted a number of investigations in this area, as well as providing support to investigations let by other forces.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers work in the UK special paedophile unit; what their annual budget is; and what plans he has to increase staff and resources. [72525]

Mr. Denham: Each United Kingdom police force is individually responsible for the investigation of such crimes within its own area and most have their own specialist units. In addition the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) provides support through the provision of intelligence by its Serious Sex Offenders Unit, which has eight staff and a budget of £370,000 per annum and the National Crime Squad and National High Tech Crime Unit carry out operations and provide assistance to other forces.

Allocation of resources now and in the future for the investigation of paedophile crime is a matter for individual Chief Officers of Police.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the EU Committee for implementation of the action programme to tackle discrimination is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67746]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The next meeting of the committee is scheduled for 27 November 2002.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Public Disorder

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of whether the PSA target to reduce the level of disorder will be met by March. [47400]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* There is no Public Service Agreement target for disorder. However, the Government is committed to the reduction of disorder and anti-social behaviour in our neighbourhoods. Among the important steps we have taken are the measures in the Police Reform Act 2002 to: improve the effectiveness of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs); create community support officers and to stop nuisance use of motor vehicles. The majority of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships now have anti-social behaviour co-ordinators in place to ensure effective local delivery of reduction in anti-social behaviour.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the ethnic groups enjoying separate monitoring; and if he will estimate the size of each such group. [63612]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 21 June 2002]:* There is no central record of monitoring of ethnic or religious groups taking place in Great Britain. The key source of population data for monitoring ethnicity is the Census. Census 1991 data is the latest available and Census 2001 data should become available from the Office for National Statistics for the United Kingdom in 2003.

The ethnicity question in the 2001 Census is based on a "self-classification" coding system. Individuals can identify themselves against the existing 16 ethnic Census categories, and if none of these capture the individual's ethnicity, additional space is provided where they can identify their ethnicity. As such, the Census captures the full breadth of ethnic groups.

For each ethnic group, the Census can provide information on demographic profile, household structure and type of accommodation, health, educational achievement and employment.

In relation to the new Race Relations (Amendment) 2000 Act, the Specific Duty requires, among other things, that public bodies carry out ethnic monitoring.

Narcotics and Psychotropics

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the EU Committee for the application of the rules on the manufacture and placing on the market of certain substances used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70913]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The procedures and guidance for meetings of the Drug Precursor Committee are contained in Articles 10 of both European Union Council Regulation 3677/90 and European Union Council Directive 92/109.

The Committee usually meets every quarter and the next meeting is scheduled to take place in Brussels on 19 September 2002.

The United Kingdom Government is a member of the Committee, represented at all meetings by the Home Office, the lead United Kingdom Government Department for this Committee. When necessary other Government Departments also attend and it is open to the Scottish Executive to do so.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in, discussions with the Home Office at official and Ministerial level on the formulation of European Union policies that touch on matters falling within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Faith Communities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list projects involving faith communities which are supported by his Department. [71844]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office supports projects involving the following faith-based groups:

Name of organisation	*Faith*	*Amount of grant*	*Period of funding*	*Purpose of grant*
Care for the Family	Christian	£94,457	2002–04	Developing training resources for parenting and marriage enrichment among South Asian communities.
Children's Society	Christian	£120,888	2002–04	Developing parenting education for fathers, particularly those from Asian Muslim communities.
Churches Community Work Alliance	Christian	£44,500 (annual)	Ongoing	Strategic funding for core operartions
Council for Mosques Day Centre	Muslim	£149,984	2002–05	Enables voluntary and community organisations to employ person to capacity-build community by increasing number of local volunteers.
Council of Sikh Gurdwaras in Birmingham	Sikh	£138,421	2002–05	Enables voluntary and community organisations to employ person to capacity-build community by increasing numbers of local volunteers.
Family Matters Institute	Christian	£122,400	2001–03	Mobilising community resources from voluntary groups attached to churches and faith communities to strengthen family life
Gujarat Hindu Society (Preston)	Hindu	£8,200	2002–03	Fostering community cohesion by bringing together young people from different communities and providing sports and leisure activities during the summer holidays which lessen the likelihood of them being involved in crime.
Gurdwara Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib (Dudley)	Sikh	£49,950	2002–05	Enables voluntary and community organisations to employ person to capacity-build community by increasing numbers of local volunteers.
Interfaith Network	Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Jain, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian.	£180,000	2001–04	Strategic funding for core operartions
Interlink Foundation	Jewish	£75,000 (annual)	Ongoing	Strategic funding for core operations
KJ Academy	Christian	£20,000	2001–02	Helping the African-Caribbean community in East London to develop good parenting skills, to improve parental participation in their children's education and promote male role models.
Lancashire Council of Mosques	Muslim	£172,552	2000–03	To support building mutually respectful and understanding relationships between minority ethnic communities in Lancashire and Lancashire Constabulary, so people from those communities will see the police as a worthwhile career option.

Name of organisation	Faith	Amount of grant	Period of funding	Purpose of grant
Langley House Trust	Christian	£1,260,000 (annual)	Ongoing	Provision of accommodation for hard-to-place offenders who are otherwise refused accommodation.
Langley House Trust	Christian	£500,000 (annual)	Ongoing	Additional funding to enable enhanced supervision of highest risk offenders who are accommodated.
League of British Muslims	Muslim	£41,540 (annual)	Ongoing	Strategic funding for core operations
Liverpool Church of England Council for Social Aid	Christian	£429,000 (annual)	Ongoing	Running an approved bail hostel
Muslim Khatri Association (Leicester)	Muslim	£17,250	2002–03	Foster community cohesion by bringing together young people from different communities and providing sports and leisure activities during the summer holidays which lessen the likelihood of them being involved in crime.
Muslim Welfare House (Finsbury Park)	Muslim	£133,956	2000–03	Providing facilities for women-only employment, training and education opportunities to address language and cultural barriers faced by minority ethnic women, and emotional and practical help for those with domestic or marital difficulties; and helping minority ethnic young men, access a wider range of employment, training and education opportunities than otherwise available.
Preston Muslim Forum	Muslim	£8,800	2002–03	Foster community cohesion by bringing together young people from different communities and providing sports and leisure activities during the summer holidays which lessen the likelihood of them being involved in crime.
Ripon Diocesan Church of England Council for Social Concern	Christian	£852,000 (annual)	Ongoing	Running two approved bail hostels
Shree Hindu Community Association	Hindu	£138,093	2002–05	Enables voluntary and community organisations to employ person to capacity-build community by increasing numbers of local volunteers.
Society of St Vincent de Paul	Christian	£826,000 (annual)	Ongoing	Running two approved bail hostels
Talking Matters Association	Jewish	£45,000	2002–04	Tackling social exclusion of Orthodox Jewish communities by increasing linguistic, cultural and educational opportunities.
Tranmere Community Project of Tranmere Community Church	Christian	£84,620	2002–05	Enables voluntary and community organisations to employ person to capacity-build community by increasing numbers of local volunteers.
West London Mission	Christian	£422,000 (annual)	Ongoing	Running an approved bail hostel
YMCA England	Christian	£113,360	2001–03	Developing quality standards in parenting education and providing a mentoring service to YMCAs and other groups wishing to undertake work in this field.
YMCA England	Christian	£113,360	2001–03	Providing time for carers to reflect on their parenting experiences, working with families during school holidays and offering support on specific parenting issues.

Ecstasy

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether seized ecstasy tablets are tested to see whether they are cut with other illegal drugs. [71854]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Ecstasy can, and does kill unpredictably. There is no such thing as a safe dose and Ecstasy does not need to be contaminated with any other drug to kill.

Seized ecstasy tablets (MDMA) are tested for the presence of other illegal drugs by the Forensic Science Service (FSS). The analytical methods employed by the FSS to test ecstasy tablets identify a range of other controlled substances, such as other ecstasy type drugs; opiates such as heroin and codeine; cocaine; amphetamines and methylamphetamine; diazepam; cannabis and methadone. The test will identify material down to a concentration of one per cent. or less.

In the case of a suspected ecstasy related fatality, the FSS would screen for, and if present, quantify the ecstasy in the deceased's blood. The FSS would also screen for other common controlled substances, such as the types listed above.

Criminal Justice and Police Act

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 with regard to the powers of the police to confiscate alcohol in sealed containers. [72099]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 provides the police with new powers to confiscate alcohol from persons who are drinking in areas that have been designated by the relevant local authority under section 13 of the Act. The Act also amended existing powers to confiscate alcohol from under-age drinkers in public places. In both instances it is now clear that the police can confiscate alcohol in containers that have been opened, but not alcohol in sealed containers.

We have discussed the current position with the Association of Chief Police Officers and we have asked them for advice on whether a further change in the law would be helpful, to clarify or strengthen police powers to confiscate alcohol, including alcohol in sealed containers, from under-age drinkers or from persons who are drinking

and causing nuisance in designated areas. We shall seek to introduce any change in the law as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Drug-related Crime

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of (i) crimes and (ii) violent crimes committed per annum in the UK to finance the purchase of illegal drugs and *(b)* the total value of the goods and money stolen per annum in the UK to finance the purchase of illegal drugs. [72655]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Recorded crime figures include statistics on drugs offences and on acquisitive crimes, such as burglary, but do not record whether the latter are related to an offender's drug habits. Levels of drug-related crime cannot be measured directly as no routine statistical data are collected on whether an offence may have been committed as a result of drug taking. However, the NEW-ADAM (New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring) research published between 1998 and 2001 sheds some light on the links between drugs and acquisitive crime. The research is insufficiently advanced, however, to reveal the precise links between drugs and violent crime. Neither are we able to supply an estimate of the total value of the goods and money stolen per annum in the United Kingdom to finance the purchase of illegal drugs.

NEW-ADAM research by Bennett reported in Home Office Research Study 205, "Drugs and Crime: The Results of the Second Developmental Stage of the NEW-ADAM Programme" and in Research Findings 148 and 183 has shown that the mean number of property crimes committed by those using heroin and cocaine/crack was around 200 in the last 12 months compared to 52 for those using neither heroin nor crack/cocaine. Over forty per cent. of arrestees thought that their drug use and crime were connected, and when asked about this connection, more than two-thirds said that this was due to the need for money to buy drugs. Those who tested positive for three or more drugs reported on average three times the number of offences and eight times the illegal income, as those who did not test positive. They also reported twice as many arrests in the last twelve months.

Findings reported in "Arrest Referral: Emerging Findings from the National Monitoring and Evaluation Programme" (Home Office: Sondhi, O'Shea, Williams, 2002) were used to estimate that the total spend on illegal drugs by those seen by Arrest Referral workers as around £550 million (or around £11,000 for an individual), although not all of this figure will be directly attributable to crime. The NEW-ADAM research has also found that in the year 1999–2000, on average arrestees reported generating just over £5,000 in illegal income, the most common source of which was property crime.

Speeding

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers were fined and how much was paid in fines for speeding in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland in (i) 2000 and (ii) 2001; and how many police man hours were used to catch drivers who were guilty of speeding in (A) England, (B) Wales and (C) Northern Ireland in each year. [72172]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The table shows the total number and amount (£) of fines ordered to be paid following conviction for speeding offences within England and Wales separately for 2000. As the majority of such offences are dealt with by the issue of a fixed penalty, the table also shows the total amount of fixed penalties ordered to be paid. Not all fines and fixed penalties will have been paid. Information for 2001 will be available in the Autumn.

The total police time in England spent on traffic is eight per cent. We cannot break this figure down into time spent on speeding offences without a specific data gathering exercise which would be both time consuming and could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Fines and fixed penalties data for speeding offences, England and Wales, 2000

	Court Proceedings			*Fixed Penalties*	
	Number of Fines	*Total Amount of Fine (£)*	*Average Fine*	*Number of Tickets*	*Estimated Revenue (£)*[1]
England	128,700	17,011,000	£132	926,760	40,160,000
Wales	10,500	1,083,000	£103	96,720	4,191,000

[1] "Estimate" based on the following fixed penalty charges—£40 up to 31 October 2000 and £60 as from 1 November 2000.

Operation Landmark

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Operation Landmark and what resources are being put into it. [72524]

Mr. Denham: Operation Landmark was an international police operation led by the National Crime Squad to combat paedophile activity on the Internet, focusing on open source data in newsgroups hosted by a British-based Internet Service Provider in November 2001.

By prioritising the email accounts of the most active individuals in the newsgroups, 130 targets were identified around the world. The National Crime Squad produced evidential packs on the targets and briefed officers from the relevant national and domestic police forces. Detailed investigations were then launched against each target; in the United Kingdom each of the ten targets were arrested and subsequently charged and their computer equipment seized. Eleven child victims have been identified as a result of the operation so far. The operation involved the National Crime Squad, Interpol, nine United Kingdom police forces and 12 other international police forces.

Other recent operations against paedophile use of the Internet have had good results at home and internationally. These have involved United Kingdom police forces, the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad and the new National High Tech Crime Unit within it.

Police Stations (Telephone Response)

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average answering time is for someone ringing a police station directly in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales. [72404]

Mr. Denham: Information on the average answering time for someone telephoning a police station is not collected centrally.

Asylum Seekers (Afghanistan)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers from Afghanistan have been repatriated in each of the last 12 months. [73220]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available information on the number of Afghan principal asylum applicants removed from the United Kingdom relates to 2001 and is given in the table. These figures exclude persons departing voluntarily without informing the Home Office.

Afghan principal asylum applicants removed [P,E,1,2]

January 2001	10
February 2001	*
March 2001	5
April 2001	5
May 2001	5
June 2001	*
July 2001	5
August 2001	20
September 2001	5
October 2001	15
November 2001	20
December 2001	30
Total	125

Figures rounded to the nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.
[P] Provisional data, subject to change.
[E] Data have been estimated due to data quality issues.
[1] Includes persons departing "voluntarily" after enforcement action had been initiated against them.
[2] Nationality breakdown of dependants removed is not available.

I regret that information on the destination of asylum seekers removed or departing voluntarily from the United Kingdom is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost. Therefore it is not possible to determine how many of these persons were returned or departed voluntarily to Afghanistan. However, it has until recently been our policy to not normally enforce returns to Afghanistan, so the majority of those recorded above will have been returned to another (third) country rather than to Afghanistan.

Information on the nationality of asylum seekers removed in the calendar year 2001 was published on 31 July in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2001", copies of which are available in the Library and via the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html. Nationality data for the first quarter (January to March) of 2002 will be published on 30 August on the RDS website.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money is owed within the probation service; and *(a)* by and *(b)* to whom it is owed. [73225]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office only has records relating to the outstanding debts on capital raised for Probation Service investment, dating from the period before 1990. The Home Office pays local authorities a grant in respect of the principal and interest on this capital financing debt. A table of the local authority debts, as at 1 April 2001, is provided in the table. Between 1990 and 2001, capital debt was financed by the local authority capital financing standard spending assessment (SSA). Since April 2001 however, local authorities are no longer responsible for Probation Service capital investment.

With the advent of the National Probation Service from 1 April 2001, the National Probation Directorate is now collecting and collating the information relating to the 2001–02 accounts for the 42 local probation boards, including any creditors. When this exercise has been completed and audited, the consolidated accounts will be laid before Parliament.

Pre-1990 System Loan Debt Outstanding at 1 April 2001

Probation Service	*Amount*
Bristol City Council	430,722
Bedfordshire CC	133,011
West Berkshire DC	462,820
Buckinghamshire CC	494,377
Cambridgeshire CC	N/A
Cornwall CC	453,636
Derbyshire CC	240,286
Devon CC	448,056
Dorset CC	112,802
Durham CC	279,329
Essex CC	295,496
Gloucestershire CC	180,780
Hampshire CC	228,181
Worcestershire CC	177,729
Hertfordshire CC	7,334
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	486,629
Kent CC	164,705
Lancashire CC	821,006
Leicestershire CC	33,726
Lincolnshire CC	129,383
Norfolk CC	344,554
Northamptonshire CC	251,273
Northumberland CC	11,01,053
South Tyneside MDC	268,905
Oxfordshire CC	74,831
Shropshire CC	151,943
Somerset CC	431,524
Staffordshire CC	1,067,882
Surrey CC	15,230
East Sussex CC	72,207
Middlesbrough UA	566,364
Warwickshire CC	75,529
Walsall MDC	1,718,807
Wiltshire CC	139,003
Receiver of the Metropolitan Police District	3,522,361
LB Croydon	67,801
Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames	6,284

Pre-1990 System Loan Debt Outstanding at 1 April 2001

Probation Service	*Amount*
LB Barnet	492,116
LB Enfield	22,322
LB Hillingdon	19,713
LB Hounslow	11,917
LB Newham	12,682
LB Redbridge	234,737
LB Waltham Forest	20,626
Bolton MDC	393,825
Bury MDC	269,132
Manchester City Council	632,816
Oldham MDC	322,559
Rochdale MDC	307,784
Salford City Council	331,033
Stockport MDC	431,116
Tameside MDC	2,183,018
Trafford MDC	3,893,774
Wigan MDC	458,527
North Yorkshire CC	59,430
Barnsley MDC	165,094
Doncaster MDC	131,099
Rotherham MDC	82,032
Sheffield City Council	175,721
Bradford MDC	172,178
Calderdale MDC	68,726
Kirkless MDC	139,253
Leeds City Council	259,145
Wakefield MDC	113,580
Carmarthenshire CBC	164,927
Bridgend CBC	4,069
Cardiff City Council	9,843
Neath Port Talbot CBC	365,970
Newport CBC	194,692
Flintshire CBC	101,809
Powys CBC	92,092
Total	**26,671,237**

Throckmorton Accumulation Centre

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the health and environmental implications of locating *(a)* pregnant and *(b)* other asylum seekers at Throckmorton, with particular reference to (i) the Hill of Moor landfill site and (ii) the foot and mouth disease burial site; and if he will make a statement. [72920]

Beverley Hughes: These issues will be assessed as part of the planning process.

Child-related Work

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what strategy he has to ensure that all people who work with children have the necessary skills and experience to do the job. [72909]

Mr. Denham: The Government's objective is that all those who work with children and young people should be supported and trained appropriately. There is already substantial investment in training for professionals in the public sector who work with children and young people but we are always looking at how we can do more. For example, we are currently developing proposals aimed at bringing consistency to the training and development of all school support staff, which will be the subject of consultation during the Autumn term; we are also introducing a 3-year degree level qualification in social work in England from September 2003 to replace the current 2-year Diploma courses.

The Cross-cutting Review of Children at Risk, within the Government's Spending Review 2002, recommended that there should be a common core of competence and knowledge shared by all who work with children and young people. CYPU is responsible for taking this recommendation forward, in close conjunction with lead Government Departments and with the Sector Skills Councils who will be responsible for Occupational Standards across the children's sector.

Financial Services Sector

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Minister for Women how many fair pay champions have been nominated to spread best practice in the financial services sector. [70616]

Ms Hewitt: Fair pay champions have been appointed to assist the Government's drive towards achieving equal pay for women through the promotion and sharing of good practice in their sectors. We are currently working with the Equal Opportunities Commission to understand how the pay gap varies from sector to sector, including the financial services sector, and to support sectors in closing the gender pay gap.

No Fair Pay champion has yet been appointed in the Financial Services Sector but we do have a Fair Pay Champion in the Retail Finance sector, a sector currently undergoing major organisational change and one with the highest pay gap at 42 per cent.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Minister for Women how many financial sector employers in the *(a)* public and *(b)* private sector have carried out pay reviews with a view to ensuring equal pay since 2000. [70615]

Ms Hewitt: In relation to the public sector, the Government has committed all Civil Service departments and agencies to undertake an equal pay review and have in place action plans to close any equal pay gaps, by April 2003. Departments and agencies are at various stages of reviewing their pay systems. In relation to the private sector, we do not have this information and it would involve disproportionate cost to provide it. However the Kingsmill Report included examples of financial sector organisations which have carried out employment and pay reviews or are committed to doing so. The Equal Opportunities Commission is also supporting organisations in conducting Equal Pay reviews and is planning to monitor progress by employers.

Revolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Minister for Women when the EU Committee for the action programme to promote gender equality is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [67745]

Ms Hewitt: The EU Equality Advisory Committee will meet on 9 October. An official will attend this meeting from the Department's Women and Equality Unit.

Each Member State delegation is considered to be one committee member. Each member can not be represented by more than one person. However, with the Chairperson's permission, the delegations may be accompanied by experts, at the expense of the Member State concerned.

The Equal Opportunities Commission is separately represented at the Equality Advisory Committee.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touched on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) what weaknesses have been identified in the CPS complaints handling procedure; what has been done to address the weaknesses; and what performance evaluations have taken place in each CPS region to ensure that corrective action has been effective; [60219]

(2) what good practice has been identified in the CPS complaints handling procedure; where examples of good practice arose; and what action has been taken to share good complaints handling practice throughout the CPS regions. [60220]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HM CPSI), which undertakes regular inspections of all CPS Areas and a study by the Joint Standing Committee on Good Practice, (which incorporates membership from both HM CPSI and the CPS) along with the complaints statistics that are compiled on a quarterly basis and are included in the CPS Annual Report reveal the following weaknesses in the CPS complaint's procedure:

(i) There is a wide variation in the quality of complaints processing. Although all CPS Areas maintain a register of complaints received from the public, some Areas record them alphabetically whilst others record them chronologically. There are occasions when it is difficult to identify what has happened to a complaint and whether follow up action has been taken.

(ii) The annual target for 2001–02, was to increase to 93 per cent. the proportion of replies to complaints which are made within 10 days. This target was not met. Timely replies were made in 81.9 per cent. of cases compared with 95.3 per cent. in 2000–01.

The main recommendations suggested include the use of a standard framework for logging complaints and that there should be periodic reviews of complaints by senior management to assess the timeliness and quality of responses to complaints and to analyse any developing trends with a view to identifying aspects of performance and processes which may need improvement or revision.

Performance evaluation is an ongoing process which is assessed by HM CPSI when they revisit a specific CPS Area. HM CPSI reports on CPS Areas can be obtained on request to the relevant CPS Area.

The following good practises within the CPS complaints procedure were identified nationally:

(i) A consistent approach in defining what is a complaint.

(ii) The use of a Register to log all complaints.

(iii) A consistent approach to time limits (a full response to be sent to the complainant within 3 working days of receipt into the Department, or failing that an acknowledgement to be sent within this time and the full response to be sent within 10 working days).

A Good Practice guide, approved by the CPS Board in June, will shortly be circulated to staff via the CPS intranet.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she records correspondence and complaints primarily by the name of the sender; how complaints from the public have influenced the processes employed by the CPS, the Solicitor-General and the Attorney General; and if complaints have been reviewed by *(a)* the HMCPSI and *(b)* law officers in an internal review. [59338]

The Solicitor-General: All correspondence (including complaints) received in the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers is recorded in a mail index by name. It is then assigned to a file according to the subject matter and source. The Law Officers consider what action is required on case-by-case basis depending on the nature of the complaint.

All CPS Areas maintain a register of complaints received from the public. They have a discretion to record them alphabetically or chronologically according to when the complaint was received. Area inspections by HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate routinely include scrutiny of the complaints register, as well as the timeliness and quality of responses to complaints. This aspect of the scrutiny by HMCPSI is undertaken with the assistance of lay inspectors.

Although not mandatory, the Crown Prosecution Service encourages managers to periodically review and analyse complaints received with a view to identifying aspects of performance and processes which may need improvement or revision. The Joint Standing Committee on Good Practice (which incorporates membership from both HMCPSI and the CPS) has recently concluded a study of the processes within the CPS for handling complaints. Its proposed guidance was approved by the CPS Board in June. Considerable emphasis is placed on the scope for continuous improvement which is achievable through proper analyses of, and response to complaints.

In view of the scrutiny of complaints handling effected by HMCPSI, the Law Officers have not found it necessary to instigate an internal review of the CPS complaints procedure.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what inquiries are being held by the CPS concerning the measures needed to enable vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to give their best evidence. [60228]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provides for special measures to be made available to vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to enable them to give their best evidence. The Government has announced that these measures are to be introduced on a phased basis from 24 July 2002.

The CPS is not holding any inquiries on these measures, but Areas are having discussions with their partner agencies in the Criminal Justice System to ensure both the effective implementation of the special measures and that appropriate action is taken where a witness is vulnerable or intimidated.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General which CPS areas have not reduced the time taken from arrest to sentence of persistent young offenders from 142 to 71 days; and what action has been taken by each failing region to comply with Government targets. [60224]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The time taken from arrest to sentence of persistent young offenders exceeds 71 days in 13 of the 42 CPS Areas: Avon and Somerset, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, London, Northamptonshire, Surrey, Sussex, Thames Valley and Warwickshire.

The Crown Prosecution Service has implemented measures for contributing to the reduction of delay which draw upon the recommendations of good practice made by HMCPS Inspectorate in its report published in May 2002, including the use of Youth Specialists to identify and review cases involving persistent young offenders and to expedite those cases at court and participation in inter agency steering groups at strategic and practitioner levels to monitor the progress of cases involving persistent young offenders and to promote joint strategies to overcome barriers to progress.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what training CPS staff have received in achieving Best Evidence guidance on preparing for and conducting interviews with vulnerable and intimidated witnesses; and which and how many staff have been trained on each CPS area. [60227]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The CPS will not be involved in interviewing vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, however, the guidance for achieving "Best Evidence" will be used by lawyers when reviewing video recorded evidence.

The training consists of an e-learning package, followed by a three day practical course. To date 269 members of staff have received this training. These staff members are comprised of both caseworkers and lawyers from across all the Areas.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how each area has responded to the CPS action plan on diversity; and how this response addressed the issues raised in the report by Sylvia Denman and the Commission for Racial Equality. [60225]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* All CPS Areas have produced their own Race Equality Action Plans. Areas have set employment targets for 2002 and 2005 for minority ethnic staff.

The CPS Race Equality Scheme (RES) was launched on 14 May 2002. The RES is a national three-year strategy on race. All the recommendations of the Commission for Racial Equality and Sylvia Denman have been accepted by the CPS and those which have not already been implemented are included in the RES. All Areas must ensure that they comply with the national RES.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of the impact of training programmes on the *(a)* efficiency and *(b)* effectiveness of each CPS region. [59350]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* CPS training is provided and assessed both nationally and locally. Assessment of the impact of training programmes is undertaken at a number of levels in the CPS. National training programmes are monitored and evaluated centrally to assess their effectiveness overall in meeting their aims and supporting the achievement of business plan objectives.

In addition to the national training plan, Areas identify their own local training needs and solutions, which they believe will help improve their effectiveness and efficiency. This is set out in Area Training Plan or programme. Area management teams assess the overall impact of local training events and programmes as part of the Business planning and review process.

Staff and line managers have joint responsibility for assessing the impact of training on individual performance. These reviews take place as part of the appraisal process and training is discussed at the annual and interim performance reviews.

41 Areas and HQ are accredited as Investors in People, and as such meet the baseline standard for evaluation of training and the assessment of its impact on performance.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the work of each CPS region in relation to the conduct of prosecutions and on the related assessments made. [59464]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The role of the CPS is to prosecute cases firmly, fairly and effectively, when there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction and when it is in the public interest to do so. The Code for Crown Prosecutors, which is issued under section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, is of fundamental importance to each CPS Prosecutor. It provides guidance on the general principles to be applied in every case irrespective of geography.

Her Majesty's CPS Inspectorate assesses the application of the Code in each Area inspection. Areas are inspected biennially. In his annual report for the year ending September 2001, HM Chief Inspector of the CPS reported that for cases sampled during Area inspections during the year, his inspectors were satisfied in 98.9 per cent. of cases sampled that the initial review decision was in accordance with the evidential test in the Code for Crown Prosecutors, and that the public interest test was satisfied in 99.9 per cent. of cases sampled.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what nature of training is provided for Crown prosecutors with respect to the code for Crown prosecutors; and what assessment has been carried out on the effectiveness of this training programme. [59337]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* An Induction Course for Lawyers is delivered to all new prosecutors within the Crown Prosecutors within 2 months of recruitment, which includes a session specifically on the Role of the Crown Prosecutor of which the Code for Crown Prosecutors is the core element.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of these training programmes is assessed in three ways:

Meetings between the Prosecutor and their line manager ultimately leading to the Crown Prosecutor's probationary review.

Each Unit Head analyses the overall performance of their Crown Prosecutors against the performance indicators for each Area.

All tutors involved in the delivery of these programmes are invited to feedback and contribute to updating the training briefs.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of how the most qualified lawyers in the CPS have spent their time since the production of Sir Iain Glidewell's report in June 1998. [59463]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The Crown Prosecution Service does not record in detail the individual tasks on which individual lawyers are deployed. Following the recommendations in Sir Iain Glidewell's Report the Crown Prosecution Service has been putting in place operational structures that enable its lawyers to spend more time advising the police and preparing the more serious prosecutions, by establishing co-located Criminal Justice Units and Trial Units for Crown Court work. In addition, the government proposes to implement the recommendation of Sir Robin Auld that the CPS should take over responsibility from the police for determining the charge from the outset of the case, which the CPS and police are currently piloting. These structural changes are enabling more early legal advice before charge, and more focus on casework preparation in more serious cases to ensure that prosecutions are built on secure ground.

By the end of March 2002, lawyers in 31 CPS Areas had been assigned to Crown Court work in 54 discrete Trial Units; and 42 co-located Criminal Justice Units had been established in 20 Areas. As at the end of June 2002 some 394 lawyers had qualified as Higher Courts Advocates, with the right to conduct cases in the Crown Court.

To help facilitate this shift in gravity, by the end of June 2002 some 178 members of the CPS who are not lawyers had been approved to work as Designated Caseworkers, trained to review and present a defined range of the most straightforward cases in the Magistrates' Courts, freeing up lawyer time for more serious cases. In addition, also reflecting Sir Iain Glidewell's Report, the CPS now employs an Area Business Manager in each Area, and a growing number of Unit Business Managers in Areas with Trial Units, enabling lawyer managers, including Chief Crown Prosecutors, to delegate some of their administrative responsibilities and devote more of their time to casework. There remains a cadre of Special Casework lawyers, and the lawyers in the Casework Directorate continue to advise on and conduct cases ranging from terrorism to extradition, to serious fraud.

More Crown Prosecutors are benefiting from greater exposure to Crown Court proceedings and their skills, experience and expertise in dealing with the more serious cases are being developed.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has carried out of *(a)* the quality and *(b)* the timeliness of production of the case files received from the police within each CPS region for (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [59462]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* The statistics on timeliness and quality of police files submitted to the CPS are published by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary each quarter. The data is broken down by the 43 police forces; a table of the data is attached to this answer.

In 2000–01 the percentage of files received within the time guidelines ranged from 50–99 per cent.; and number which contained sufficient evidence to proceed or were fully satisfactory ranged from 74–98 per cent.

In 2001–02 those same figures ranged from 47–100 per cent. and 33–98 per cent. respectively.

These wide disparities are a matter of concern. The Joint Performance Monitoring process is currently under review to ensure the measuring systems are fair and accurate.

Quality and timeliness of case files 2001–02

	Timeliness and Quality Percentage of files within Pre-Trial Issues time limits and fully satisfactory or sufficient to proceed (per cent.)	*Timeliness Percentage of files within Pre-Trial Issues time limits (per cent.)*	*Quality Percentage of files fully satisfactory or sufficient to proceed (per cent.)*
Avon and Somerset	65	71	90
Bedfordshire	87	95	89
Cambridgeshire	46	58	81
Cheshire	80	87	92
City of London	85	86	98
Cleveland	77	87	87
Cumbria	82	85	96
Derbyshire	73	77	95
Devon and Cornwall	54	61	85
Dorset	54	70	75
Durham	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dyfed-Powys	64	70	90
Essex	62	67	85
Gloucestershire	59	70	84
Greater Manchester	n/a	n/a	n/a
Gwent	48	57	82
Hampshire	68	70	96
Hertfordshire	49	100	49
Humberside	44	55	79
Kent	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lancashire	61	66	92

Quality and timeliness of case files 2001–02

	Timeliness and Quality Percentage of files within Pre-Trial Issues time limits and fully satisfactory or sufficient to proceed (per cent.)	*Timeliness Percentage of files within Pre-Trial Issues time limits (per cent.)*	*Quality Percentage of files fully satisfactory or sufficient to proceed (per cent.)*
Leicestershire	92	96	96
Lincolnshire	73	78	92
Merseyside	50	71	71
Metropolitan Police	n/a	n/a	n/a
Norfolk	64	69	93
Northamptonshire	85	86	97
Northumbria	86	100	86
North Wales	65	69	93
North Yorkshire	75	86	87
Nottinghamshire	73	77	93
South Wales	84	90	90
South Yorkshire	58	62	94
Staffordshire	64	71	89
Suffolk	81	90	90
Surrey	57	63	89
Sussex	76	92	82
Thames Valley	n/a	n/a	n/a
Warwickshire	91	99	92
West Mercia	43	47	89
West Midlands	49	63	78
West Yorkshire	33	100	33
Wiltshire	60	67	87

Source:
HMIC

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor-General what her estimate is of the proportion of CPS cases resulting in a non-jury acquittal in the Crown Court which are attributable to failures in the review process in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [69215]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* In 1999 the Crown Prosecution Service introduced an adverse outcomes analysis system. This provides CPS Areas with a consistent framework within which responsibility may be allocated for the failure of cases through a process of self-assessment, including an indication of the number of non-jury acquittals attributable to failings in the CPS review. The following table shows these outcomes as a proportion of all cases completed in the Crown Court during the three years for which figures are available:

Year ending March:	
2000	0.7
2001	0.6
2002	0.5

These figures suggest that failings in the CPS review account for a small and diminishing proportion of non-jury acquittals.

However, the findings in the HMCPSI Annual Report for 2001–02 suggest that the level of foreseeable adverse outcomes is higher. Figures published in the Report show that 33.57 per cent. of adverse outcomes were foreseeable, and that 19.02 per cent. should have been the subject of some remedial action or dropping the case sooner. These figures relate to a different reporting period, smaller sample and with reference to a different test than those gathered by the CPS. The disparity is greatly exaggerated in presentation by the fact that CPS use a percentage of their total caseload, while the HMCPSI look at only a sample and calculate as a proportion of the adverse cases. Nonetheless, this disparity is a cause for concern.

The Service is conscious that its self-assessment procedures require the support of more sensitive information. The CPS and the police have begun to develop a joint case outcomes analysis which will build on existing procedures and will focus on avoidable case failures. Under this system it is intended that the reasons for non-jury acquittals will be jointly analysed to identify trends and individual and more general training needs, as part of a wider strategy for the identification of good practice. The process will be supported by more sophisticated management information generated through the forthcoming Compass Case Management system, which is scheduled to be rolled out across all CPS Areas between April and December 2003.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor-General what estimate she has made of the proportion of Crown Prosecution Service cases dismissed on a submission of no case to answer which are attributable to failures in the review process in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [69208]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The analysis of adverse outcomes, described in my response to the hon. Member's related question on non-jury acquittals (UIN 69215), includes an assessment of the number of dismissals no case to answer attributable to failings in the CPS review. The following table shows these outcomes as a proportion of all cases completed in the magistrates' courts during the three years for which figures are available:

Year ending March:	
2000	0.010 per cent.
2001	0.008 per cent.
2002	0.011 per cent.

As the above figures show, dismissals for no case to answer attributable to failings in the review process form

only a very small part of the overall caseload of the Service. However, there was a small increase in the level of these outcomes during 2001–2002, from 0.008 per cent. of the overall caseload, or 8 per 100,000, to 0.011 per cent., or 11 per 100,000. While this trend is not considered significant, it does show that there is no room for complacency. The arrangements for improved information on case outcomes described in my response to the Hon Member's related question will provide CPS managers, at a local and national level, with a better analysis of the reasons for case failures, and will strengthen their ability to identify and resolve any areas of concern.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Solicitor-General what recent assessment has been made of the adequacy of the resources available to the Crown Prosecution Service; and what steps are being taken to increase Crown Prosecution Service efficiency and its ability to proceed with cases for trial. [72129]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* An assessment of the adequacy of the resources available to the Crown Prosecution Service was made for the purposes of the 2002 Spending Review, the outcome of which was announced on 15 July.

The White Paper, Justice For All, set out a far-reaching program of change for the criminal justice system and for the Crown Prosecution Service. This programme will improve CPS efficiency and ability to proceed with cases for trial including:

closer working with the police and increasing the number of Criminal Justice Units collocated with the police and the number of Trial Units as envisaged in the Glidewell report on the CPS;

providing earlier and better advice to the police on charging and giving the CPS the responsibility to determine the charge in all but the most routine cases. Early indications from 6 pilot Areas show that giving the CPS the responsibility to determine the charge will lead to significant improvements in performance;

changes to trial procedures to improve efficiency and effectiveness; and

the development of the CPS's IT system, Compass, which is an essential part of a more joined up approach to information technology across the criminal justice system.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General as a percentage of staff employed within each CPS area and region, how many are crown prosecutors; and how many crown prosecutors within each region secured accreditation as higher court advocates in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, and *(c)* 2001–02. [59344]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 12 June 2002]:* Copies of Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 have been placed in the Library. The percentage of Crown Prosecutors employed in each Area and Region is set out in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

The number of lawyers who have gained accreditation from 1 April 1999 until 31 March 2002 is set out in Table 5.

The number of higher court advocates in each area is set out in Table 6.

Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General when she last met the DPP; and if she will make a statement. [60575]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* I regularly meet the Director of Public Prosecutions in the course of my official duties both formally and informally. Departmental meetings with the DPP take place approximately once every three weeks, and further meetings occur to discuss particular issues as they arise.

My last meeting with the Director was on 19th July.

Public Engagements

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General how many public engagements she has undertaken since 7 June. [60574]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Since 7 June 2001 my public engagements have consisted of:

(1) 9 sessions of oral parliamentary questions

(2) 9 visits to regional CPS offices

(3) 6 visits to the legal departments of other government departments in connection with the Law Officers role as superintenders of the Government Legal Service

(4) 13 visits to courts, police stations, prisons and CPS offices, in connection with my role as the chair of the committee on the Criminal Justice System in London.

(5) 10 official launches or openings

(6) 28 speeches

(7) hosting 6 receptions

(8) 10 formal dinners

(9) 3 Auld report consultation events

(10) 2 visits in connection with my role as street crime sponsor minister.

Departmental Waste

Sue Doughty: To ask the Solicitor-General what proportion of waste produced in her Department was *(a)* recycled, *(b)* composted and *(c)* re-used, broken down into (i) paper, (ii) plastics, (iii) aluminium cans and (iv) other in each year since 1997; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if she will make a statement. [65697]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The detailed information requested is not available. However, all of the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible make efforts to ensure that waste products are disposed of appropriately. In particular, paper and toner cartridges (which together represent a majority of the waste produced) are re-cycled by the Treasury Solicitor's Department, Crown Prosecution Service and the Attorney General's own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers. The Treasury Solicitor's Department and Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers also re-cycle all used fluorescent tubes.

As part of the Law Officers' Departments' contribution to Sustainable Development, we are continually reviewing the extent to which waste may be recycled.

Youth Justice

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Solicitor-General when she next expects to meet the CPS to discuss youth justice. [64439]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* My right hon. and learned Friend, the Attorney General, and I discuss youth justice at our regular meetings with the DPP and with local CPS staff on our visits to the CPS Areas. I discussed the issues with HM Chief Inspector, CPS Inspectorate on the eve of publication of the joint inspectorate report on the progress made in the reduction of delay in the youth justice system on 23 May 2002.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor-General what her estimate is of the average length of time between transfer/committal and verdict for the Serious Fraud Office in each year since 1997–98; and if she will make a statement. [69209]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The average time taken between committal or transfer and verdict each year since 1997–1998 is given below:

1997–98	12.8 months
1998–99	19.2 months
1999–2000	20.2 months
2000–01	15.5 months
2001–02	20.0 months

The Serious Fraud Office works hard to reduce unduly long trials by securing, where possible, defence admissions of non-contentious evidence and by contributing towards the provision of real-time transcription services. In addition, the SFO regularly presents complex evidence in a graphical or electronic form, which improves clarity and saves time for the jury and court.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor-General how many cases were handled by the Serious Fraud Office in each year since 1998–99; and if she will make a statement. [69108]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Serious Fraud Office worked on the investigation and prosecution of the following number of cases each year:

1997–98	102 cases
1998–99	94 cases
1999–2000	95 cases
2000–01	103 cases
2001–02	92 cases

These figures exclude appeals pending and cases with outstanding confiscation matters.

The Serious Fraud Office investigates and prosecutes some of the largest and most difficult cases in the UK often involving substantial sums of money exceeding £1 million. I refer my honourable friend to my answer to Dave Watts of 10 January 2002.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Solicitor-General what the average time was from accepting a case to completing investigations for the Serious Fraud Office in each year since 1997–98. [69109]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The average time taken between acceptance and committal or transfer to the Crown Court for a Serious Fraud Office case since 1997–98 is set out below:

1997–98	24 months
1998–99	34 months
1999–2000	29 months
2000–01	30 months
2001–02	33 months

Manslaughter (Doctors)

Mr. Hague: To ask the Solicitor-General how many prosecutions for manslaughter have been brought against doctors since 1974; and how many of them have been acquitted by the jury, and at what cost to public funds. [72997]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* It is extremely difficult to give precise figures. Before 1993, prosecutions were recorded by the name of the defendant and not by the defendant's occupation.

In 1993 a new case-tracking system was introduced by the CPS which allowed prosecutions for manslaughter arising from gross medical negligence to be recorded. But these figures do not distinguish between doctors and other medical staff.

Bearing in mind these caveats, the CPS has estimated that since 1994 twelve doctors have been prosecuted for "medical" manslaughter. Of those, eight were acquitted of all charges and four were convicted of at least one count on the indictment.

There are no central records of the cost of prosecuting particular categories of case.

The principles applied by Crown prosecutors when deciding whether the prosecution of a doctor, or of any other person, is justified are set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors. The prosecutor must be satisfied that the evidence is sufficient to provide a realistic prospect of a conviction. If there is sufficient evidence the prosecutor goes on to consider whether a prosecution is needed in the public interest. Because manslaughter is such a serious offence, if the evidence is sufficient to justify proceedings a prosecution would normally follow. Cases involving allegations of "medical" manslaughter are considered by the Casework Directorate at CPS headquarters rather than by the CPS Area in which the death occurred.

Trial Outcomes

Mr. Chope: To ask the Solicitor-General how many trials there were in which an offender was brought to justice in each of the last five years. [71612]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply to this question using information recorded by the Crown Prosecution Service.

The attached table shows the number and the proportion of defendants convicted in magistrates' courts and in the Crown Court in the year ending March 2002, and in each of the four preceding years.

Convictions 1997–2002

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Magistrates' courts					
Total convictions as per cent. of hearings	953,753 (98.1)	972,650 (98.3)	986,136 (98.3)	929,806 (98.3)	933,305 (98.3)
Crown Court					
Total convictions as per cent. of hearings	87,273 (90.6)	70,935 (89.1)	66,960 (88.6)	62,419 (87.9)	62,824 (88.8)

Court Evidence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Solicitor-General what rules of *(a)* procedure and *(b)* evidence may prevent a prosecution witness giving evidence of (i) the appearances of a defendant whom that witness has seen at the scene of an alleged crime, (ii) the fact of a defendant being of no fixed abode and (iii) the whereabouts of objects at the scene of an alleged theft which are not the subject of a charge of theft. [55455]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* There are no specific rules of procedure or evidence affecting these categories.

Whether a witness is permitted to give evidence on a particular issue depends on the relevance of their testimony to the charge before the court, and whether that evidence is admissible. There are many factors which might affect the admissibility of evidence, and each case would depend upon its precise facts.

If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind I would be glad to attempt to provide a fuller answer.

Casework Review

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General when the thematic review of all aspects of casework having a minority ethnic dimension was published; and if this thematic review included the London area. [60226]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate published the Report of its thematic review of CPS Casework Having a Minority Ethnic Dimension on 10 April 2002.

Inspectors examined performance in sixteen CPS Areas, of which London was one.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Solicitor-General what statutory law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities there are within the responsibility of her Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57128]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The Law Officers Department is responsible for three prosecuting authorities: The Crown Prosecution Service, the Serious Fraud Office and the Prosecuting Arm of HM Customs and Excise.

All complaints received by the CPS are dealt with in accordance with designated procedure set out in a complaints leaflet. This is also available on the Internet on the CPS website www.cps.gov.uk. There are three stages to the CPS complaints handling procedure. Complaints are initially directed to the Branch or Unit that dealt with the case in question. The Branch Crown Prosecutor or Unit Head will arrange for a response to be sent.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with this response, or alleges impropriety by the CPS, the matter will be referred to the Chief Crown Prosecutor.

Complaints which cannot be resolved by the Chief Crown Prosecutor are referred through the Customer Service Unit to the Director of Public Prosecutions or Chief Executive who will consider how the complaint should be handled and arrange for a response to be sent. Where possible, a full response should be sent to the complainant within three working days of receipt. If a full response is not possible, an acknowledgement should be sent within three days and a full response within 10 working days.

The Serious Fraud Office complaints procedure is that minor complaints about members of staff are dealt with by Line Managers or their Assistant Directors.

Formal written complaints addressed to the Director are dealt with either by her or passed or an Assistant Director for full investigation.

Complaints about the professional conduct of legally qualified SFO staff may be made to the appropriate professional standards body such as the Bar Council or the Law Society.

Customs and Excise complaints procedure is contained within their Code of Practice which is available on their website www.hmce.gov.uk.

Where complaints cannot be resolved with the Customs Officer concerned, complainants are directed to the Regional Complaints Unit. That Unit will ask the appropriate local manager to investigate the complaint and the Unit will then respond normally within 10 working days.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with that response, the complaint can be reconsidered by the Regional or Business Head.

Where a complainant is not satisfied with the response by the Customs and Excise, the matter may be raised with the Adjudicator. The Adjudicator will give an independent view of the case and make a recommendation.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60898]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 885W. There are no specific plans for expenditure in 2002–03.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what percentage of the staff of her Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66905]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 5 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 622W.

Recyling

Sue Doughty: To ask the Solicitor-General what proportion of *(a)* paper and *(b)* other goods purchased by her Department was recycled paper in each year since 1997; what the annual total cost of these purchases was; what plans there are to increase these proportions; and if she will make a statement. [65768]

The Solicitor-General: In relation to the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible, the information available is as follows:

The Crown Prosecution Service has a policy of purchasing recycled paper wherever possible. The paper provided under the Department's central contract for office use is 100 per cent. recycled—approximate cost £500,000. Of the products supplied under the central contract for supply of other paper-based products, in 2001–02 82 per cent. by volume (approximate cost £80,000) contained an element of recycled content (ranging from 35 per cent. to 100 per cent. pre- and post-consumer waste).

The Department does not hold information on recycled paper usage back to 1997.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department is able to reply only in general terms, as records have not been, and are not, kept in such a way as to provide this information.

Since 2000, 100 per cent. of white paper purchased has been from recycled stock. The Agency budgeted £100,000 for paper in each of the last two financial years and although the spend on white paper cannot be separately identified, it does make up the bulk of the figure.

Other recycled products bought are not on record, though contracts specify that suppliers should have regard to environmental factors when providing goods to the agency. There are at present no specific plans to increase the proportion of recycled goods procured but the Agency is always ready to consider means of "greening" its operations when it can do so in an efficient and cost-effective way.

The Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, is small and paper usage is comparatively low. Although recycled paper has been used in the past, purchases must be made on a best value for money basis. Until recently, the cost and quality of recycled paper did not provide this compared to virgin paper from sustainable resources. However, recycled paper appears to have improved in both quality and price and the Department has recently recommenced the purchase of recycled paper.

The Serious Fraud Office does not currently purchase recycled paper but will consider the matter again in the light of improvements in price and quality.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

GCSEs

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils achieving five or more A*–C grades at GCSE in the last year for which figures are available included an intermediate GNVQ equivalent to four A*–C grade GCSEs in their qualifications. [60876]

Stephen Twigg: The proportion of pupils in all schools in England who achieved 5 or more A*–C grades at GCSE/GNVQ, whose results included an intermediate GNVQ was 0.5 per cent. in 2000–01. This represents 1,457 pupils in 85 schools.

Key Stage 2

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the percentage point gap is between the 2001 Key Stage 2 results separately and the statutory EDP targets for *(a)* English and *(b)* maths in 2004 in each local education authority. [62661]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is shown below.

Difference in percentage points between Local Education Authority 2004 statutory targets for the proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 and above in the KS2 English and maths tests and their performance in the 2001 tests

LEA	*English*	*Maths*
City of London	4	11
Camden	8	10
Greenwich	15	18
Hackney	17	19
Hammersmith and Fulham	5	9
Islington	16	15
Kensington and Chelsea	5	6
Lambeth	13	16
Lewisham	11	18
Southwark	18	19
Tower Hamlets	10	13
Wandsworth	9	16
Westminster	6	8
Barking and Dagenham	11	13
Barnet	6	10
Bexley	7	14
Brent	10	13
Bromley	9	12
Croydon	10	15
Ealing	7	11
Enfield	12	15
Haringey	14	16
Harrow	7	11
Havering	9	12
Hillingdon	5	10
Hounslow	10	13
Kingston upon Thames	9	11
Merton	11	18
Newham	13	15
Redbridge	9	13
Richmond upon Thames	5	8
Sutton	7	15
Waltham Forest	12	18
Birmingham	12	16
Coventry	14	20
Dudley	12	18
Sandwell	18	19

LEA	English	Maths
Solihull	9	10
Walsall	15	19
Wolverhampton	12	20
Knowsley	13	16
Liverpool	14	18
St. Helens	10	12
Sefton	7	11
Wirral	9	15
Bolton	8	13
Bury	12	11
Manchester	15	17
Oldham	13	14
Rochdale	11	14
Salford	13	14
Stockport	9	12
Tameside	12	16
Trafford	7	11
Wigan	10	12
Barnsley	17	20
Doncaster	14	18
Rotherham	12	15
Sheffield	17	18
Bradford	22	25
Calderdale	12	14
Kirklees	12	15
Leeds	11	15
Wakefield	12	14
Gateshead	12	12
Newcastle upon Tyne	18	18
North Tyneside	13	17
South Tyneside	13	13
Sunderland	14	14
Isles of Scilly	17	17
Bath and North East Somerset	10	14
Bristol, City of	17	18
North Somerset	10	11
South Gloucestershire	10	15
Hartlepool	12	12
Middlesbrough	11	16
Redcar and Cleveland	10	13
Stockton-on-Tees	12	14
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	16	13
East Riding of Yorkshire	10	15
North East Lincolnshire	14	19
North Lincolnshire	12	16
North Yorkshire	9	13
York	9	12
Bedfordshire	9	18
Luton	11	18
Buckinghamshire	6	11
Milton Keynes	16	18
Derbyshire	12	16
Derby	14	17
Dorset	11	16
Poole	13	21
Bournemouth	14	14
Durham	11	12
Darlington	11	10
East Sussex	13	17
Brighton and Hove	11	18
Hampshire	10	15
Portsmouth	16	18
Southampton	22	20
Leicestershire	9	13
Leicester	16	18
Rutland	8	13
Staffordshire	12	16
Stoke-on-Trent	12	15
Wiltshire	12	15
Swindon	13	18
Bracknell Forest	8	11
Windsor and Maidenhead	10	15
West Berkshire	9	11
Reading	14	21
Slough	13	14
Wokingham	8	11
Cambridgeshire	11	15
Peterborough	11	15
Cheshire	8	10
Halton	8	15
Warrington	6	11
Devon	9	14
Plymouth	11	13
Torbay	10	15
Essex	10	14
Southend-on-Sea	12	11
Thurrock	15	23
Herefordshire	9	12
Worcestershire	11	20
Kent	12	16
Medway	15	18
Lancashire	9	13
Blackburn with Darwen	13	18
Blackpool	11	11
Nottinghamshire	12	15
Nottingham	18	20
Shropshire	11	14
Telford and Wrekin	14	20
Cornwall*	9	13
Cumbria	10	13
Gloucestershire	10	13
Hertfordshire	9	11
Isle of Wight	14	19
Lincolnshire	10	14
Norfolk	12	17
Northamptonshire	12	17
Northumberland	11	18
Oxfordshire	11	17
Somerset	12	16
Suffolk	10	18
Surrey	7	11
Warwickshire	11	13
West Sussex	12	16
England (LEA Maintained only)	12	15

*differences calculated using midpoints of agreed target ranges

Source: final 2001 performance data files and LEA Education Development Plans (EDPs)

Note:

Percentages reflect EDP and target-setting definitions: all maintained schools except

PRUs and Hospital schools. Underlying figures rounded to whole numbers.

Castle Award

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if her Department has applied for a Castle award for equal pay. [65225]

Stephen Twigg: The Department has not applied for a Castle Award for equal pay but is currently reviewing its pay system as part the Governments' commitment following the Equal Pay Task Force Report.

Further Education

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the extent to which the extra money that she provided for new pay arrangements in the further education sector has narrowed the pay gap between school teachers and further education lecturers. [65077]

Margaret Hodge: As independent organisations it is for further education (FE) colleges to agree the pay and the terms and conditions of their staff within the context of the overall resources available to them. We are aware of the differences between salaries in general further education colleges and schools and this issue is being considered as part of the current Spending Review.

We are investing more than £311 million in the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI) over the period 2001–04. TPI is separate to any general pay increase a lecturer may receive. It is designed to help modernise further education (FE) pay arrangements and to recruit, reward and retain lecturers as part of the drive to improve teaching and learning. Research on the first year of TPI implementation indicates that there is a significant move to teachers being better prepared for the task of teaching students; extra pay has been found to support the recruitment of teachers in skill shortage areas and to address casualisation; and there has been a direct positive impact on teacher morale.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of the staff of her Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66903]

Stephen Twigg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for State at the Cabinet Office on 5 July, *Official Report*, column 623W.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much each local education authority spent last year on children with special educational needs; and how much of this was spent on special schools. [69333]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Key Stage 1 classes in the maintained sector have more than 30 pupils as a result of a statement of special educational needs specifying that a child should attend a particular school. [71496]

Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The 2001 September Class Size Count Survey shows that there were 11 infant classes with 31 or more pupils as a result of a statement of special educational needs specifying that a child should attend a particular school.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children of school age are attending specialist schools in the London Borough of Wandsworth. [65050]

Mr. Miliband: As at January 2002, there were 6,469 pupils in specialist schools in the London Borough of Wandsworth, of which 5,304 were aged 11–15.

Absenteeism

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average absentee rate was for schools in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [70012]

Stephen Twigg: The average absentee rate for schools in England was 6.8 per cent. in 2000 and 7.2 per cent. in 2001. These figures represent the percentage of half days missed due to both authorised and unauthorised absences in schools. These figures relate to absences in schools between September and May in each of the relevant years.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was of publishing her Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70476]

Stephen Twigg: While the Department pays for some production costs of its annual report, these only cover the design and typesetting. The costs of printing are met directly by the publisher, The Stationery Office (TSO) and do not fall to the Department. The Department also buys in copies from the TSO to distribute internally and to our partners.

The cost for the last two years are:

The Department for Education and Employment 2001 Report

Typesetting and design	£33,813
Buying in copies from TSO	£18,600
Total	£52,413

The Department for Education and Skills 2002 Report

Typesetting and design	£42,346
Buying in copies from TSO	£16,773
Total	£59,119

Costs are not available for earlier years.

School Meals

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent monitoring she has undertaken of the nutritional content of school meals. [71123]

Stephen Twigg: Local Education Authorities, or governing bodies with schools meals budgets delegated to them, must ensure that school lunches meet minimum nutritional standards.

No recent monitoring has been undertaken, but my officials are taking advice from the Food Standards Agency about the best way evaluate the effectiveness of, and compliance with, our nutritional standards regulations.

Healthy Eating

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what encouragement she provides to head teachers to ensure healthy eating patterns are developed in school canteens. [71124]

Stephen Twigg: In April 2001 the Government introduced regulations which set minimum nutritional standards for school lunches. They were accompanied by guidance entitled "Healthy School Lunches" which was available for school caterers, heads and others implementing the standards.

The National Healthy School Standard, which was introduced in October 1999, is the mainstay of the Healthy Schools Programme and promotes healthy eating patterns. Guidance provided to local Healthy Schools Partnerships on criteria that can be used for assessing school achievements includes:

the school should present consistent messages about healthy eating: food on offer in vending machines, tuck shops and school meals, for example should complement the information about healthy eating covered in the taught curriculum;

the school should provide, promote and monitor healthier food at lunch and break times and in any breakfast clubs where they are provided;

the school should include education on healthier eating and basic food safety practices in the taught curriculum.

Education Funding

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what extra funding, in addition to the education standard spending assessment, has been provided *(a)* directly to schools and *(b)* to local authorities in England since 1999 in each local authority. [71307]

Mr. Miliband: The tables below show the Department's total recurrent and capital funding, in addition to the education Standard Spending Assessment, for the financial years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 for each local education authority, broken down between funding that goes directly to maintained schools via LEAs, and funding for LEAs' central expenditure.

Funding direct to schools via LEAs are comprised of the following grants:

Standards Fund (devolved to schools)

School Standards Grant

School Budget Support Grant

Education Budget Support Grant

Capital Grants (Devolved Formula Capital)

Grant Maintained Transitional Grant: Insurance

Funding for LEAs are comprised of the following grants (for the benefit of schools)

Standards Fund (LEA central expenditure)

Nursery Education Grant

Childcare Grant

Education Maintenance Allowances

Capital Grants (including formulaic funding to VA Schools allocated at LEA level)

Grant Maintained Transitional Grant

Funding for Education Action Zones (EAZs) is not included. This funding does not go directly to schools or to LEAs; it is paid to EAZs for use to run programmes to achieve pre-agreed targets and objectives in zone schools. EAZs are independent bodies which are exempt charities, set up in accordance with the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. In addition the Department provides special grant funding to fully meet the extra costs associated with teachers crossing the threshold (moving to the upper pay scale). Additional funding has provided a contribution to the costs of awarding performance points to those on the leadership scale and Advanced Skills Teachers. The Department is unable to provide a breakdown by LEA of this funding without incurring disproportionate cost and time. The national amount since 1999–2000 is £756 million.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her oral statement of 16 July 2002, if successful grammar schools will be eligible to take over failing schools under the proposed arrangements. [71555]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* In the document *Education and Skills: Investment for Reform,* which we published on the day of my right hon. Friend's statement to the House on 16 July, we made clear that we would be looking at a range of ways of encouraging federations and partnerships between weaker and more successful schools, including a successful school taking over a failing school. We shall provide more details on these proposals later in the year. There is no reason why successful grammar schools should not be involved in forms of federation and partnership consistent with their grammar school status, where that is appropriate to local needs and circumstances. But in doing this we will remain true to our principle of no extension of selection by ability.

Demountable Classrooms

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much additional funding is to be allocated to Essex County Council to replace demountable classrooms in the Colchester constituency with permanent accommodation. [71480]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* We do not hold information in the form requested. Most capital support is allocated to Local Education Authorities and schools by needs related formulae. It is for Essex Local Education Authority (LEA) and its schools to decide how their capital allocations are invested, as part of the development of their local Asset Management Plan. To date, Essex LEA, and its schools, have already been allocated support for £107 million of capital works in total over 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Citizenship Curriculum

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if the Citizenship Curriculum will include *(a)* knowledge of the flags and patron saints of the countries of the United Kingdom and *(b)* teaching the words of the national anthem. [71481]

Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The flags, patron saints and the national anthem of the United Kingdom are not a separate element of the Citizenship National Curriculum. However, understanding the origins and implications of the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom is an important part of Citizenship which becomes part of the statutory National Curriculum for 11–16 year olds in September 2002. In this context pupils will have the opportunity to explore the unique qualities that are part of the shared identities of the countries of the United

Kingdom. They may also consider the political, religious, social and constitutional systems that affect their lives and communities.

Departmental Staff

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many registered *(a)* town planners, *(b)* landscape designers, *(c)* chartered surveyors and *(d)* architects work in her Department. [71856]

Stephen Twigg: Within the Department for Education and Skills there are 5 registered chartered surveyors and 10 registered architects. Currently there are no town planners or landscape designers working in the Department.

Music Lessons

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assessment has been made of access to free music lessons by school pupils from low-income families in North-West Leicestershire; [71924]

(2) what methods and procedures are in place to judge the success of the Music Standards Fund in increasing access to free music lessons for musicians in *(a)* North-West Leicestershire and *(b)* English schools; [71923]

(3) what assessment has been made of the take up of free music lessons by school pupils from low-income families in England. [71925]

Stephen Twigg: The Government's White Paper *Schools: achieving success* contained the pledge that over time, all primary school pupils who wanted to should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument. The Music Standards Fund was introduced in 1999 to protect and expand LEA Music Services. Between 1999–2000 and 2003–04 total funding of £270 million has been made available to Music Services across England via the Music Standards Fund. LEAs may spend Music Standards Fund in any way which enhances the opportunities for pupils to access musical education of high quality. It is not intended to provide music lessons for musicians.

There is no requirement for LEAs to inform the Department whether Music Standards Fund has been used to increase access to and take up of music lessons for pupils from low-income families. It is for LEAs and individual schools to decide whether to operate a charging policy for instrumental music lessons provided outside of the National Curriculum, and we do not currently hold data on this.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what public consultations have been commenced by her Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72074]

Stephen Twigg: The information you have requested appears in the following table. The website address for my Department's consultations is www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations.

Title of Consultation	*Start Date*	*End Date*
Proposals to introduce a mandatory requirement for first-time headteachers to hold the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH)	22/04/2002	28/06/2002
School Teachers' Review Body's report on teacher workload	08/05/2002	03/07/2002
Electronic Communications in Education: an Order under the Electronic Communications Act 2000	08/05/2002	06/09/2002
Performance Pay Progression: Reconsultation on Revised Special Grant Report	14/05/2002	13/06/2002
Developing Early Intervention/Support Services for Deaf Children and their Families	28/05/2002	23/09/2002
Together From The Start—Practical guidance for professionals working with disabled children (birth to 2) and their families	28/05/2002	23/09/2002
Department for Education and Skills—Race Equality Scheme	31/05/2002	30/08/2002
Supporting the cost of home-based childcare	07/06/2002	30/08/2002
Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications	01/07/2002	30/09/2002

School Sports

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether she plans to make sport in schools part of the everyday curriculum. [71932]

Stephen Twigg: Physical Education (PE) remains a compulsory subject within the National Curriculum at all Key Stages. Our Public Service Agreement target, announced on 15 July, is that by 2006 we will have enhanced the take-up of PE and sporting opportunities by 5 to 16 year olds by increasing the percentage of pupils in schools who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high quality PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum to 75 per cent.

It is for individual schools and their governing bodies to decide how they utilise their timetable to cover the National Curriculum and there is no reason why schools cannot choose to provide PE and sport every day, if this best meets the learning needs of the pupils.

Capital Investment (Schools)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of capital investment is for 2003–04 to 2005–06 following the comprehensive spending review for *(a)* new or substantially refurbished primary schools, *(b)* new or substantially refurbished secondary schools, *(c)* further education and *(d)* higher education. [71859]

Mr. Miliband: Capital investment in education and skills will rise from £1 billion a year in 1997–98 to £7 billion a year by 2005–06, of which £1.2 billion will be through the private finance initiative. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce her decisions about how that capital is to be used later in the year when she has considered priorities in the round.

SEN Children

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans her Department has to

introduce a star rating system to award *(a)* local education authorities, *(b)* schools and *(c)* colleges who are putting into practice good systems to support inclusion of SEN children; what plans her Department has to name (i) local education authorities, (ii) schools and (iii) colleges who are failing or rejecting SEN children and adults; and if she will make a statement. [72028]

Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend has no such plans. However, her Department does take a close interest in local education authority, school and college systems to support inclusion, particularly through OFSTED inspection and post-inspection action planning. The Department is also considering how effective practice on inclusion might best be reflected in performance indicators used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local authorities.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in her Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72254]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 July.

St. Thomas's Hospital

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she has been consulted about the proposal by King's College London to sell the land known as Block 9 at St. Thomas's Hospital. [72383]

Margaret Hodge: Like all universities, King's College London is an independent, autonomous institution. There is no requirement on them to consult with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills before disposing of an asset, and they have not done so.

Education (St. Helens)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* fixed-term exclusions and *(b)* permanent exclusions there were from *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* special schools in (i) St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council area, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the North West and (iv) England in (A) 1996, (B) 1997, (C) 1998, (D) 1999, (E) 2000 and (F) 2001. [70862]

Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information requested on permanent exclusions is shown in the tables below. Subnational figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Whilst information on fixed term exclusions has been collected for the first time this year on a trial basis, the data is not sufficiently complete for publication. A more regular collection is being considered.

Number of Permanent Exclusions in Maintained Primary Schools (1) Academic years 1995–1996 to 1999–2000

	1995–1996		1996–1997		1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000		2000–2001	
	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population
St. Helens LEA	3	0.02	1	0.01	3	0.02	2	0.01	2	0.01	..	..
Merseyside Region	41	0.03	46	0.03	58	0.04	.	.	.	.	.	.
North West Region	225	0.04	188	0.03	207	0.04	225	0.03	194	0.03	..	..
England	1,608	0.04	1,573	0.04	1,539	0.03	1,366	0.03	1,226	0.03	1,460	0.03

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed
. Not applicable (Merseyside region incorporated within North West region)
.. Not availabie
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Number of Permanent Exclusions in Maintained Secondary Schools (1) Academic years 1995–1996 to 1999–2000

	1995–1996		1996–1997		1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000		2000–2001	
	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population
St. Helens LEA	36	0.31	36	0.30	35	0.29	24	0.20	24	0.20	..	..
Merseyside Region	344	0.36	381	0.40	348	0.36	.	.	.	.	.	.
North West Region	1,243	0.37	1,268	0.37	1,182	0.34	1,324	0.29	1,072	0.24	..	..
England	10,344	0.34	10,463	0.34	10,187	0.33	8,636	0.28	6,713	0.21	7,410	0.23

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed
. Not applicable (Merseyside region incorporated within North West region)
.. Not available
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Number of Permanent Exclusions in Special Schools(1) Academic years 1995–1996 to 1999–2000

	1995–1996		1996–1997		1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000		2000–2001	
	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population
St. Helens LEA	1	0.21	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.21	2	0.43	..	..
Merseyside Region	16	0.38	33	0.76	26	0.62	.	.	.	.	.	.
North West Region	62	0.54	77	0.66	68	0.59	66	0.42	48	0.31	..	..
England	524	0.54	632	0.64	572	0.57	436	0.45	384	0.40	340	0.36

(1) Includes maintained and non-maintained special schools
. Not applicable (Merseyside region incorporated within North West region)
.. Not available
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Total Number of Permanent Exclusions in Primary, Secondary and Special Schools(1) Academic years 1995–96 to 1999–2000

	1995–1996		1996–1997		1997–1998		1998–1999		1999–2000		2000–2001	
	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population	Number of permanent exclusions	Percentage of the school population
St. Helens LEA	40	0.13	37	0.12	38	0.13	27	0.09	28	0.09	..	..
Merseyside Region	401	0.16	460	0.19	432	0.17	.	.	.	.	.	.
North West Region	1,530	0.17	1,533	0.17	1,457	0.16	1,615	0.14	1,314	0.12	..	..
England	12,476	0.17	12,668	0.17	12,298	0.16	10,438	0.14	8,323	0.11	9,210	0.12

(1) Includes maintained primary and secondary schools and maintained and non-maintained special schools
. Not applicable (Merseyside region incorporated within North West region)
.. Not available
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many students started *(a)* higher education courses and *(b)* further education courses in (i) Merseyside, (ii) the North West and (iii) England in each year since 1996; [71287]

(2) how many students obtained certificates for completing *(a)* higher education courses and *(b)* further education courses in (i) Merseyside, (ii) the North West and (iii) England in each year since 1996. [71289]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The available information is shown in the tables.

Students Entering Further and Higher Education Courses

	Merseyside		North West		England	
	HE[1]	FE[2]	HE[1]	FE[2]	HE[1]	FE[2]
1996–97	n.a.	n.a.	73,300	753,700	729,400	5,654,900
1997–98	19,100	123,600	76,800	793,500	746,500	5,878,600
1998–99	20,300	132,400	73,100	799,200	732,300	5,503,100
1999–2000	20,800	166,000	79,900	898,500	756,200	6,019,600
2000–01	22,000	201,100	75,600	974,000	761,600	6,829,200
2001–02[3]	21,200	n.a.	79,800	n.a.	780,900	n.a.

n.a. = not available. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

1. Based on a census count of students as at December 1 for students in HE institutions. Covers all home and overseas students on postgraduate and undergraduate courses, including HE students in FE colleges and the Open University.

2. Based on a whole year count of students in FE sector colleges. Includes FE students in HE institutions.

3. HE figures contain an estimate for HE students in FE colleges. Final FE figures not yet available: the whole year count of students in FE sector colleges is collected retrospectively at the end of the academic year.

Students Obtaining Further and Higher Education Qualifications[1]

	Merseyside HE[2]	Merseyside FE	North West HE[2]	North West FE	England HE[2]	England FE
1996–97	n.a.	n.a.	41,900	397,200	411,600	2,956,000
1997–98	12,000	68,700	40,700	434,100	418,200	3,163,000
1998–99	11,100	71,600	42,200	429,300	421,000	2,927,700
1999–2000	12,100	94,600	45,900	516,700	435,100	3,441,700
2000–01	12,700	120,300	45,400	585,700	439,700	3,993,400
2001–02[3]	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

n.a. = not available. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

1. The figures cover students who obtained qualifications at any point in the academic year.
2. Includes postgraduate and undergraduate qualifications. The qualifications awarded to students in any one year result from courses of different lengths including part-time and Open University courses which last more than three years, as well as short full-time HE courses which last for less than that period.
3. Comparable figures for 2001–02 will be available in early 2003.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* administrative support staff to pupil ratio and *(b)* classroom assistance to pupil ratio was in (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools in (A) St Helens, (B) Merseyside, (C) the North West and (D) England in (1) 1996, (2) 1997, (3) 1998, (4) 1999, (5) 2000 and (6) 2001. [70805]

Mr. Miliband: *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The available information is shown in the table.

Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools: Pupil: Teacher Ratios, Pupil: Adult Ratios Pupil: Teaching Assistant Ratios and Pupil: Administrative Staff Ratios

Maintained Primary Schools (1)

Position in January each year

	Pupil:teacher ratio (2)						Pupil:adult ratio (3)(4)					
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
England	23.2	23.4	23.7	23.5	23.3	22.9	18.0	17.9	17.8	17.5	16.8	15.7
North West (7)	23.7	23.9	24.0	23.9	23.4	22.9	19.3	19.1	18.9	18.6	17.7	16.2
Merseyside (8)	23.3	23.4	23.7	23.4	23.0	22.5	19.2	19.1	19.1	18.5	17.6	15.8
St. Helens LEA	22.9	23.3	23.2	23.6	23.2	22.9	18.1	18.0	17.9	17.8	17.1	15.8
	Pupil:teaching assistant ratio (5)						Pupil:administrative staff ratio (6)					
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
England	113.4	107.4	100.6	96.8	83.7	67.3	226.6	222.3	219.8	215.2	202.0	191.0
North West (7)	120.8	113.3	105.9	101.7	90.1	68.2	289.1	280.3	273.3	266.3	247.8	231.6
Merseyside (8)	139.1	133.8	125.5	115.0	101.7	70.2	264.4	258.1	255.4	245.6	233.7	214.6
St. Helens LEA	97.7	95.5	89.8	85.4	77.8	61.0	337.1	313.4	302.6	290.4	249.5	247.1

Maintained Secondary Schools (1)

	Pupil:teacher ratio (2)						Pupil:adult ratio (3)(4)					
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
England	16.6	16.7	16.9	17.0	17.2	17.1	14.6	14.5	14.6	14.5	14.5	14.0
North West (7)	16.6	16.6	16.7	16.8	16.8	16.6	15.0	14.9	14.9	14.8	14.7	14.1
Merseyside (8)	16.2	16.3	16.5	16.5	16.6	16.2	14.6	14.6	14.7	14.6	14.4	13.6
St. Helens LEA	15.6	15.6	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.1	14.3	14.4	14.3	14.2	14.4	13.7
	Pupil:teaching assistant ratio (5)						Pupil:administrative staff ratio (6)					
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
England	467.9	388.9	342.4	294.8	255.5	209.0	176.4	172.9	169.9	167.1	163.8	152.6
North West (7)	870.6	698.1	596.0	474.1	378.6	280.3	187.3	184.7	182.2	181.4	175.1	160.4
Merseyside (8)	1295.7	977.0	770.1	611.5	451.0	287.2	189.9	191.7	187.5	185.8	176.6	157.9
St. Helens LEA	1974.7	1410.1	1106.7	693.2	538.7	305.3	185.0	169.7	182.3	181.0	173.7	166.8

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.

(2) The pupil:teacher ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers employed in schools.

(3) The pupil:adult ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers and education support staff employed in schools

(4) Education support staff includes instructors and student teachers, foreign language assistants, unqualified teachers, graduate or registered teachers, teachers entitled to qualify by service, teachers not recognised as qualified and all non-teaching staff excluding administrative and clerical staff.

(5) The pupil:teaching assistant ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent teaching assistants employed in schools.

(6) The pupil:administrative staff ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent administrative staff employed in schools.

(7) North West Government Office Region incorporates Merseyside Metropolitan County

(8) Merseyside comprises Knowsley, Liverpool, St. Helens, Sefton and Wirral LEAs.

Source:

Annual Schools Census

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the truancy rates were in *(a)* St Helens, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the North West and *(d)* England in (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools in (A) 1996, (B) 1997, (C) 1998, (D) 1999, (E) 2000 and (F) 2001. [70806]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The percentage of half days missed due to unauthorised absence are as follows:—

	St Helens	*Merseyside*	*North West*	*England*
(i) Primary schools				
1995–96	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.5
1996–97	0.2	0.4	0.5	0.5
1997–98	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.5
1998–99	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.5
1999–2000	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.5
2000–01	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.5
(ii) Secondary schools				
1995–96	0.5	1.3	1.2	1.0
1996–97	0.4	1.2	1.1	1.0
1997–98	0.5	1.4	1.2	1.1
1998–99	0.6	1.2	1.1	1.0
1999–2000	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.0
2000–01	0.9	1.3	1.1	1.1

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the pupil/teacher ratio was in *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools in (i) St Helens, (ii) Merseyside, (iii) the North West and (iv) England in each year since 1996. [71286]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

Maintained Nursery, Primary (1) and Secondary (1) Schools: Pupil: Teacher Ratios (2) Position in January each year

	England			*North West (3)*			*Merseyside (4)*			*St. Helens*		
	Maintained Nursery	*Maintained Primary*	*Maintained Secondary*	*Maintained Nursery*	*Maintained Primary*	*Maintained Secondary*	*Maintained Nursery*	*Maintained Primary*	*Maintained Secondary*	*Maintained Nursery*	*Maintained Primary*	*Maintained Secondary*
1996	19.2	23.2	16.6	20.0	23.7	16.6	17.8	23.3	16.2	20.6	22.9	15.6
1997	18.9	23.4	16.7	19.6	23.9	16.6	18.0	23.4	16.3	20.5	23.3	15.6
1998	18.6	23.7	16.9	19.3	24.0	16.7	17.2	23.7	16.5	21.3	23.2	16.0
1999	18.4	23.5	17.0	19.0	23.9	16.8	17.4	23.4	16.5	21.6	23.6	15.9
2000	18.1	23.3	17.2	18.7	23.4	16.8	16.4	23.0	16.6	22.0	23.2	16.1
2001	17.7	22.9	17.1	18.1	22.9	16.6	14.7	22.5	16.2	19.4	22.9	16.1

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed.
(2) The pupil:teacher ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers employed in schools.
(3) North West Government Office Region incorporates Merseyside Metropolitan County.
(4) Merseyside comprises Knowsley, Liverpool, St. Helens, Sefton and Wirral Local Education Authorities.
Source: Annual Schools Census

University Top-up Fees

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received about university top-up fees. [72639]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend receives representations from a wide variety of sources on a range of issues including top up fees. Most recently this has included the Education and Skills Select Committee's sixth report of the 2001–02 session which recommends the Government should seriously consider differentiated fees for university students.

Physical Education

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the research used to provide the figures for the new joint Public Service Agreement with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and her Department to raise the percentage of schoolchildren who spent a minimum of two hours each week on high quality physical education and school sports to 75 per cent. [72465]

Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Evidence from the Youth Sport Trust, Sport England and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority suggests that most pupils in schools operating as part of a School Sport Co-ordinator Partnership enjoy two hours of high quality PE and school sport a week within and outside the curriculum.

Students (Taunton)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of full-time students stayed in education in the Taunton constituency after the age of *(a)* 16 and *(b)* 18 years in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001; and if she will make a statement. [73264]

Stephen Twigg: Data on the percentage of students staying on in full-time education is not calculated for areas smaller than LEAs as reliable estimates cannot be made. Participation rates at sub-national level are only available for 16 and 17 year olds.

The percentage of 16 and 17 year olds in full-time education in Somerset LEA, which includes the constituency of Taunton, in 1997–1998 and 1999–2000, the latest year for which figures are available, is set out below:

16 and 17 year olds in full-time education: Somerset LEA

Age	*1997–1998*	*1999–2000*
16	71	74
17	63	63

Participation rates by LEA are published in an annual statistical bulletin, "Participation in Education and Training by Young People Aged 16 and 17 in Each Local Area and Region, England".

Exam Preparation

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the recommended amount of preparation time is for year 5 pupils taking SATs exams. [72827]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* There are no statutory National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 5. Neither is there any recommended preparation time for any National Curriculum test. It is for Headteachers to decide how to prepare their pupils for the tests. The QCA advises schools to prepare children for the tests by providing them with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the layout and design of test papers, encouraging them to work independently and be aware that there may be questions in the tests that they will not be able to answer.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many hours *(a)* AS level, *(b)* A level and *(c)* GCSE students spend on average in (i) exams and (ii) mock exams. [72826]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Students taking typical 4 AS subject programmes spend about 12 hours in examinations, not counting resits. The equivalent figure for students completing the second half of the new A levels in 3 subjects is 9 hours. GCSE students spent an average of 17 hours in examinations. These figures mask large variations in individual student programmes.

No statistics are available for the number of hours spent in mock examinations for any of these qualifications.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the recommended amount of preparation time is for Key Stage *(a)* 1, *(b)* 2 and *(c)* 3 SATs exams. [72828]

Mr. Miliband *[holding reply 24 July 2002]:* There is no recommended preparation time for any National Curriculum test. It is for Headteachers to decide how to prepare their pupils for the tests. The QCA advises schools to prepare children for the tests by providing them with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the layout and design of test papers, encouraging them to work independently and be aware that there may be questions in the tests that they will not be able to answer.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much time *(a)* Key Stage 1 SATs exams, *(b)* Key Stage 2 SATs exams and *(c)* Key Stage 3 SATs exams take on average (i) per pupil and (ii) per school. [72825]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:*

Key Stage 2

The National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science are timetabled to take 5 hours and 15 minutes spread over a week.

Key Stage 3

The National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science are timetabled to take 7 hours and 20 minutes spread over a week.

All children in the school will usually take the tests at the same time.

Key Stage 1

The Key Stage 1 tasks and tests are not timed. It is the responsibility of teachers to decide both the timing of the assessments and whether to administer the tests and tasks to whole classes, smaller groups of pupils or on an individual basis.

Science And Discovery Centres

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to assist the funding of science and discovery centres; and if she will make a statement. [72321]

Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Government has currently no plans to assist the funding of science and discovery centres. On Monday, The Millennium Commission, together with the Wellcome Trust and the Wolfson Foundation, launched a £33 million fund for science centres and museums to allow them to renew or replace high quality science, education and technology exhibitions.

Free School Meals

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children were in receipt of free school meals in each year from 1996–1997 to 2001–02 in *(a)* foundation, *(b)* voluntary-aided-community, *(c)* specialist, *(d)* city technology college, *(e)* grammar and *(f)* voluntary-controlled schools. [65395]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

Maintained Primary schools: percentage of children eligible for a free school meal England Position in January each year

Type of school (2)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*Percentage 2000*	*2001*	*2002 (provisional)*
Foundation Schools(1)	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.0	11.3	11.2
Voluntary Aided Schools	18.5	17.3	16.3	15.3	14.4	13.9
Specialist Schools (3)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Voluntary Controlled Schools	13.6	12.5	11.9	11.3	10.7	10.3

Maintained Secondary schools: percentage of children eligible for a free school meal England Position in January each year

Type of school (2)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*Percentage 2000*	*2001*	*2002 (provisional)*
Foundation Schools(1)	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.9	10.4	9.9
Voluntary Aided Schools	19.1	18.3	17.5	14.7	14.0	13.2

Maintained Secondary schools: percentage of children eligible for a free school meal England Position in January each year

Type of school (2)	1997	1998	1999	Percentage 2000	2001	2002 (provisional)
Specialist Schools	14.1	13.5	14.1	13.8	14.0	13.7
City Technology Colleges	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Grammar Schools	3.7	3.4	3.1	2.9	2.4	2.4
Voluntary Controlled Schools	10.9	10.5	10.0	9.8	9.8	9.2

n/a Not applicable
(1) Introduced in 2000
(2) The school types listed are not mutually exclusive, for instance voluntary aided, voluntary controlled or foundation could be specialist schools
(3) No schools of this type

Secondary Schools

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were not allocated the secondary school of their first, second and third preference in the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [70665]

Mr. Miliband: Information is not routinely collected on parental preference and their outcomes in the admissions process. A research project commissioned by the DfES entitled, "Parents' experiences of the process of choosing a secondary school" published in June 2001 revealed that (from a sample of 2,170 parents):

85 per cent. of parents were offered a place in their favourite school (1)

92 per cent. received an offer of a place in a first preference school (2)

96 per cent. of parents were offered a place in a school for which they expressed a preference.

91 per cent. of parents said they were satisfied with the outcome of the application processCopies of the report and research brief are available on the Departments website at: *http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/*

(1) Favourite school refers to the school identified by surveyed parents as the school that they most wanted their child to attend out of all the names of schools to which the parents applied to for a place.

(2) First preference school refers to: (i) schools ranked first in the applications to Local Education Authority controlled schools in the parents' own Local Education Authority; (ii) schools which an application was made and which are their own admissions authorities, and (iii) applications to Local Education Authority controlled schools which an application is made, which are in a Local Education Authority other than the one in which the parent is resident.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils who wanted co-educational secondary education were put in single sex schools in the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [70664]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is not available centrally.

Special Measures

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average time spent in special measures by English *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools has been in the last five years. [73040]

Mr. Miliband: The average time spent by schools in special measures for the last 5 years has been 21 months for primary schools and 29 months for secondary schools.

The Government is committed to ensuring that the number of schools placed in special measures continues to decline and that all schools in special measures should be turned around in two years or closed. Further options to ensure more rapid turnaround of schools were proposed in the White Paper *Schools: Achieving Success* in 2001 and new measures are included in the Education Act 2002 to enhance and widen the intervention powers of LEAs and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average change in annual revenue budget was for an English *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary school placed in special measures over the last five years. [73039]

Mr. Miliband: Funding support for schools placed in special measures is provided through a targeted element of the Standards Fund school improvement grant. LEAs receive direct funding support of £70,000 for each secondary school placed in special measures and £25,000 for each primary school to support schools with the implementation of their post-OFSTED action plan and to secure necessary improvements. The amount of additional support devolved to each school in special measures is a decision for the LEA.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many English *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary schools have been put into special measures in each of the last five years. [73041]

Mr. Miliband: The number of schools placed in special measures for the each of the last five years is:

	Secondary	Primary
1997–98	42	210
1998–99	30	141
1999–2000	38	168
2000–01	23	100
2001–02*	19	94

* Figures for this year may change, pending final corroborations.

Over this period, a total of 912 schools have recovered from special measures. The number of schools in special measures rose from 326 at the beginning of 1997–98 to a peak of 515 at the end of that academic year. The total has now reduced to 273.

Ethnic Ratios (Schools)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the ethnic ratio is for schools in the Taunton constituency; and if she will make a statement. [73257]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is shown in the table below.

Percentage of Pupils by Ethnic Group (1) in Maintained Primary and Maintained Secondary Schools As at January 2001

	Percentage of Pupils	
	Primary	Secondary
White	97.77	94.84
Black Caribbean	0.04	0.03
Black African	0.04	0.15
Black Other	0.07	0.10
Indian	0.06	0.02
Pakistani	0.03	0.03
Bangladeshi	0.04	0.10
Chinese	0.10	0.15
Other	0.73	3.01
Unclassified	1.11	1.54
Number of Pupils	6042	5838

(1) Pupils of compulsory school age and above were classified according to ethnic group.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Departmental Activities

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the activities pursued by her Department that have had a particular impact on Somerset since 7 June 2001. [73256]

David Miliband: Details of activities pursued by the Department since 7 June 2001 that have had an impact on Somerset have been placed in the Library.

Class Sizes

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent evidence she has evaluated on the improvements in educational results to be realised through *(a)* marginal reductions in average class sizes and *(b)* alternative, more flexible uses of the same scale of resources within the educational system; and if she will make a statement. [72988]

Mr. Miliband: It is too early to evaluate fully the impact of smaller class sizes policy on educational achievement. However, there is evidence, some of which pre-dates the smaller class size policy, that smaller class sizes have a beneficial effect on pupil progress, particularly in maths and literacy, in Reception children. I am exploring how schools might make better use of all their resources—teachers, support staff and ICT through the Transforming School Workforce pathfinder project. The Department has commissioned a pilot survey to examine the feasibility of collecting the detailed school resourcing information needed to evaluate the impact of resource mix on performance.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average class size is, ranked according to local education authority, at the latest date for which figures are available. [72398]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many children were excluded from school in each of the London borough education authorities as of 1 June. (65048)

Stephen Twigg: The available information on permanent exclusions for the latest year for which data are available is shown in the following table. Information on Fixed Term Exclusions is not available centrally.

Number of Permanent Exclusions by Type of School, 1999–2000

	Primary (1)		Secondary (1)		Special (2)		Total	
	Number of Permanent Exclusions	Percentage of the school population (3)	Number of Permanent Exclusions	Percentage of the school population (3)	Number of Permanent Exclusions	Percentage of the school population (3)	Number of Permanent Exclusions	Percentage of the school population (3)
LONDON	16	0.03	1066	0.27	56	0.45	1289	0.12
Inner London	7	0.03	410	0.33	30	0.62	516	0.14
Camden		0.02	16	0.15	4	1.33	22	0.10
City of London		0.45	0	0	0	0	1	0.45
Hackney		0.03	22	0.28	4	1.04	31	0.12
Hammersmith and Fulham		0.04	17	0.25	0	0.00	21	0.12
Haringey		0.03	18	0.16	1	0.25	25	0.07
Islington		0.01	18	0.24	0	0.00	20	0.08
Kensington and Chelsea		0.07	19	0.53	0	0.00	24	0.23
Lambeth	1	0.06	16	0.22	4	0.62	31	0.11
Lewisham	1	0.07	52	0.45	7	1.32	75	0.21
Newham		0.03	25	0.15	0	0.00	33	0.07
Southwark		0.03	58	0.59	3	0.66	69	0.20
Tower Hamlets		0.00	30	0.22	0	0.00	31	0.09
Wandsworth		0.03	82	0.84	7	0.94	94	0.33
Westminster		0.02	37	0.46	0	0.00	39	0.22
Outer London	9	0.02	656	0.24	26	0.34	773	0.11
Barking and Dagenham		0.04	23	0.22	1	0.50	31	0.11
Barnet		0.02	50	0.24	1	0.29	57	0.12
Bexley		0.02	22	0.13	6	1.50	33	0.08
Brent		0.04	47	0.33	1	0.24	57	0.15
Bromley		0.01	24	0.12	1	0.22	28	0.06
Croydon		0.02	76	0.45	4	0.73	87	0.18
Ealing		0.01	24	0.16	0	0.00	27	0.06
Enfield		0.01	68	0.34	1	0.19	73	0.15
Greenwich		0.03	36	0.26	0	0.00	43	0.12
Harrow		0.02	34	0.39	0	0.00	39	0.13
Havering		0.00	33	0.21	0	0.00	34	0.09
Hillingdon		0.02	39	0.24	4	0.61	47	0.12

Number of Permanent Exclusions by Type of School, 1999–2000

	Primary (1)		Secondary (1)		Special (2)		Total	
	Number of Permanent Exclusions	Percentage of the school population (3)	Number of Permanent Exclusions	Percentage of the school population (3)	Number of Permanent Exclusions	Percentage of the school population (3)	Number of Permanent Exclusions	Percentage of the school population (3)
Hounslow		0.04	44	0.27	1	0.25	52	0.14
Kingston upon Thames		0.01	15	0.18	0	0.00	16	0.08
Merton		0.04	16	0.21	1	0.41	23	0.10
Redbridge		0.02	23	0.12	2	0.44	29	0.07
Richmond upon Thames		0.01	24	0.32	0	0.00	25	0.13
Sutton		0.00	19	0.14	0	0.00	19	0.07
Waltham Forest	1	0.05	39	0.30	3	0.43	53	0.15

(1) Includes middle schools as deemed
(2) Includes Maintained and Non Maintained Special Schools
(3) The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of full time and part-time pupils of all ages in Primary, Secondary and Special schools, excluding dually registered pupils in special schools in January 2000.
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children aged five, six, and seven were in infant classes of over 30 on *(a)* 1 May 1997, *(b)* 31 December 1998, *(c)* September 2001, *(d)* 31 December 2001 and *(e)* the latest date for which information is available; and if she will make a statement. [69297]

Mr. Miliband: The available information collected from the Annual Schools Census in January of each year and from the September Class Size Count is shown in the table.

Key Stage 1 Classes taught by one teacher in Maintained Primary Schools (1)(2) England

	Number of pupils in classes of 31 or more in:	
Academic Year	*September (3)(4)*	*January*
1996–1997		476,822
1997–1998		485,311
1998–1999	354,000	356,586
1999–2000	171,000	176,962
2000–2001	30,000	35,813
2001–2002	8,000	10,398(p)

(1) Classes as taught during the one selected period in each school on the day of the census in January.
(2) Key Stage 1 classes of 31 or more may contain pupils who have been admitted as permitted exceptions.
(3) This figure includes estimates of pupils entering later in the Autumn term under staggered entry arrangements from schools which did not make a return.
(4) Class sizes as measured in September are not directly comparable with those in January. As any differences in the figures will reflect seasonal effects such as pupils entering in January.Not available. The September Class Size Count took place for the first time in 1998.
(p) Provisional
Source:
Annual Schools Census and September Class Size Count

School Absence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the change has been in the number of *(a)* unauthorised absences and *(b)* exclusions in schools since 1998. [69294]

Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Number of Exclusions (1) and Unauthorised Absences (2) In Schools in England

	Total Exclusions	Percentage of school population (3)	Percentage of half days missed because of unauthorised absence (4)
1997–98	12,298	0.16	0.7
1998–99	10,438	0.14	0.7
1999–2000	8,323	0.11	0.7
2000–01	9,210(5)	0.12(5)	0.7

(1) Includes maintained primary and secondary and maintained and non-maintained special schools.
(2) Includes maintained primary and secondary schools, maintained and non-maintained special schools, independent schools and city technology colleges.
(3) The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the total number (headcount) of full and part-time pupils of all ages (excluding dually registered pupils in special schools) in January each year.
(4) The percentage is calculated by dividing the number of sessions (i.e. half days) missed due to unauthorised absence by the total number of sessions.
(5) Provisional estimates
Source:
Annual Schools' Census and the Absence in Schools Survey

Faith Communities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list projects involving faith communities which are supported by her Department. [71848]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is not collected centrally by my Department.

Autistic Children

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to reduce the number of exclusions from school of autistic children; how she plans to support autistic children in Autism Awareness Year; and if she will make a statement. [72027]

Stephen Twigg: Figures on the number of children excluded from school by type of special educational need are not collected centrally. Guidance from the Department makes clear that, other than in the most exceptional circumstances, schools should avoid permanently excluding pupils with statements of special educational needs. The guidance also requires head teachers to say, when reporting exclusions to Discipline Committees and local education authorities, whether the pupil has special educational needs, either with or without a statement. The most recent figures show that the rate of permanent

exclusions for children with statements of special educational needs as compared with other pupils is declining—three times as high in 2000–01 as *compared* with six times as high the previous year.

On 22 July the Department published guidance from its Autism Working Group on autistic spectrum disorders. This provides guidance to schools, local education authorities and others on the nature of the disorders and pointers to good practice. It will raise awareness of autistic spectrum disorders further and help teachers and local education authorities to fulfil their statutory duties to meet children's special educational needs, whether the children are in mainstream or special schools.

Mental Health

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to *(a)* help schools promote mental health and *(b)* support teachers and pupils in dealing with mental health problems. [72686]

Mr. Miliband: In June last year, the Department published guidance "*Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings*". The guidance is designed to help teachers and others, working alongside mental health professionals, to promote children's mental health and to intervene effectively with those experiencing problems. A four page summary is also available.

The National Healthy School Standard (NHSS), which was launched in October 1999, has as one of its specific themes "Emotional Health and Well being", which includes awareness of mental health issues. The development of emotional health and well being is covered in the National Curriculum as part of the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) framework. PSHE enables pupils to develop their self-esteem, confidence and well being. It also helps pupils to appreciate the effect of their actions on their own lives and the lives of others, and to understand the limits and codes of personal and social behaviour.

In addition the Department has been working with its partners to develop a long-term strategy on behaviour improvement. A key measure being piloted is the establishment of Behaviour and Education Support Teams. Their role is to provide an effective early intervention model of supportive services to children and young people who are experiencing emotional, behavioural and mental health problems, and their families. These multi-agency Teams will link with Social Services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The Department are working closely with the Department of Health on the National Service Framework (NSF) for children. One of the modules will be setting standards for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Officials in my Department are represented on the CAMHS module.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings her Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72712]

Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Information is not available in the form requested. *Ministers from my Department* have frequent meetings with Ministers from the Scottish Executive, both formal and informal, covering a broad range of topics.

Secondary Schools, Taunton

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many vacancies, unfilled with permanent staff, in secondary schools there are in the Taunton constituency; and how many there were in 1997. [73265]

Mr. Miliband: In January 2002, there were 12 vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in Somerset Local Education Authority, compared with no recorded vacancies in January 1997.

In the same period, the number of full-time equivalent regular teachers working in the maintained sector in Somerset Local Education Authority rose by 290. This is the most recent information available.

Better Public Buildings Initiative

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will name the projects the departmental Design Champion has sponsored as part of the Better Public Buildings initiative; and if she will make a statement on the extent of her personal input in respect of each. [73643]

Mr. Miliband: My noble Friend, the Baroness Ashton is the Department's Design Champion and she will announce which projects she is to sponsor in the autumn.

Asylum Seekers (Nottingham)

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children from families of asylum seekers are in Nottingham schools; what additional funding has gone to schools in Nottingham to address the needs of the children of asylum seekers; how much specialist language teaching the Government have funded for each child from an asylum-seeking family in Nottingham; and what funding packages the Government have made available in Nottingham to meet the education and training needs of asylum seekers. [73691]

Stephen Twigg: There were over 400 children from families of asylum seekers in Nottingham schools in May 2002 but numbers fluctuate greatly throughout the school year.

Nottingham schools receive funding for these children in the same way that they do for all other children on school rolls, through the Education Standard Spending Assessment. Both LEAs are eligible for funding through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG). The total allocations for EMAG for 2002–03 are £1,974,000 for Nottingham City and £278,000 for Nottinghamshire. In addition, Nottingham has received a total of £148,500 from this Department's grant to support the children of asylum seekers in schools in the Home Office dispersal areas.

In Nottingham, the EMAG supports 100 specialist teachers who provide English language support to children, including those from asylum seeking families.

The provision of funding to meet the education and training needs of asylum seekers is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive to write to the Honourable Gentleman with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Pupil Funding

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will commission independent research to establish the gap in the level of funding per pupil between school sixth forms and colleges of further education. [73645]

Margaret Hodge: Given the different ways in which schools and colleges are funded and the very much broader remit of colleges, comparisons on the funding of school sixth forms and colleges of further education are far from straight forward. My Department is currently considering the best basis for making sound comparisons and we do not believe that external research is necessary. The Government remains firmly committed to bring up the level of funding of colleges towards that of school sixth forms. However, as we have repeatedly made clear, this will take time and must be done as resources allow.

Child Care

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action is being taken to ensure that the national child care strategy is able to offer affordable places to all children whose parents wish it in neighbourhood renewal areas; and if she will make a statement. [73543]

Mr. Miliband: Childcare plays a critical role in sustaining and strengthening communities and in helping parents out of poverty through work.

Affordability of childcare can be a major barrier for many parents, particularly women and lone parents wishing to take up employment, education and training. The Childcare Tax Credit helps parents to take up the provision made available through the National Childcare Strategy by giving financial assistance to low and middle income working parents to pay for childcare. Some 158,000 families have already benefited from this help.

The Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative, part of the National Childcare Strategy, was launched in 2001. Over £203 million has been made available to create 45,000 high quality childcare places in the most disadvantaged areas in England. All Neighbourhood Renewal areas are in the target areas for Neighbourhood Nurseries.

Following the conclusions of the Inter Departmental Review of Childcare, the Chancellor announced on 15 July a £1.5 billion combined budget for childcare, early years education and Sure Start by 2005–06. The extra funding will support the expansion of childcare places across England, with particular emphasis on disadvantaged areas through the setting up of children's centres integrating good quality childcare with early years education, family support and health services. Our longer term aim is to establish a children's centre in every one of the 20 per cent. most disadvantaged areas.

Learn Direct Plus

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, how many people have enrolled on learndirect plus in Portsmouth South constituency since it began; how many courses are provided in Portsmouth South; how much funding has been provided for these courses; and if she will make a statement. [64728]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: *[pursuant to the reply 27 June 2002, 19W]:* an incorrect figure was quoted. There have been 1839 learners to date in the Portsmouth South constituency since *learndirect* was rolled out in October 2000.

Job Location

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many jobs under the remit of her Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by her Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72740]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The information requested is set out in the table below:

	Scotland		*England ex. Greater London*		*Greater London*	
	No. WTE	*per cent.*	*No. WTE*	*per cent.*	*No. WTE*	*per cent.*
Core Department	0	-	2125	51.0	2040	49.0
NDPBs	590	7.5	6558	83.3	724	9.2
Executive Agencies	0	-	0	-	0	-
Ind. Stat. Bodies						

	Wales		*Northern Ireland*		*Others*	
	No. WTE	*per cent.*	*No. WTE*	*per cent.*	*No. WTE*	*per cent.*
Core Department	0	-	0	-	0	-
NDPBs	0	-	0	-	0	-
Executive Agencies	0	-	0	-	0	-
Ind. Stat. Bodies						

DfES does not hold information in the form required for independent statutory bodies and other organisations which it financially sponsors.

The percentages are of the total numbers in the core Department and in its NDPB's.

Area-Based Initiatives

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for each area-based initiative for which her Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71457]

Estelle Morris: The table below sets out the original budgets for area based initiatives and shows the carry forward amounts for each initiative.

£ millions[1]	2000–2001 In year Budget	2000–2001 Spend	2000–2001 Carry forward	2001–2002 In year Budget	2001–2002 Spend	2001–2002 Carry forward
Neighbourhood Nurseries	0	0	0	46	2	44
SureStart	184	56	128	206	136	70
Education Action Zones[2]	59	56	3	64	63	1
Children's Fund	0	0	0	85	34	51
Community Champions	1	1	0	3	3	0

Footnote
[1] All budgets are rounded to the nearest million.

Learning And Skills Council

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list in respect of each programme transferred to the Learning and Skills Council *(a)* the agency, or agencies, previously responsible, *(b)* the total resources allocated in 2000–01, *(c)* the total resources allocated for 2001–02 and *(d)* the estimated costs of administering the programme in 2000–01. [71175]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested at *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* is shown in the following table. The best estimate of the cost of administering the programme in 2000–01 is between £270 million and £280 million.

	a) Agency responsible for the delivery of the programme in 2000–2001	b) Total resources expended in 2000–2001 £	c) Total resources allocated for 2001–2002 £
ADMINISTRATION			
Administration	FEFC/TECs	275,000,000	188,000,000
FURTHER EDUCATION			
Capital	FEFC	54,842,800	140,000,000
Participation	FEFC	3,311,043,000	3,609,489,000
Summer Schools	FEFC		2,000,000
FE and 16–18 Sector Rationalisation			
Recurrent Funding	FEFC	8,946,886	7,737,000
Standards Fund	FEFC	70,000,000	186,000,000
Pastoral Support	New in 2001–02		3,000,000
Student Support	FEFC	93,490,186	103,796,000
Ethnic Minority Student Achievement Grant	FEFC	2,000,000	2,000,000
Skill and View	DfES	92,000	97,000
Dance and Drama	DfES	5,740,175	8,450,000
Teacher's Pay Initiative	New in 2001–02		65,000,000
WORK BASED LEARNING			
Health and Safety Booklets	DfES	76,171	87,000
Work Based Training for Young People	TECs	809,540,623	748,650,000
Gateway Programme	DfES	1,067,994	250,000
Youth Policy Development	DfES	2,212,482	1,400,000
Life Skills	TECs	949,900	61,000,000
Other Work Based Learning Programmes	DfES	8,528	1,469,000
OTHER			
Adult Information Advice and Guidance	DfES	18,795,475	23,000,000
National Marketing and Promotion	DfES	302,403	7,300,000
NVQ Marketing and Promotion	New in 2001–02		350,000
Local Initiatives	TECs	16,301,595	95,300,000
Excellence Challenge	New in 2001–02		3,900,000
Adult and Community Learning	DETR	145,000,000	153,000,000
Workforce Development	DfES	62,467,477	48,241,000
Education Business Links	DfES	13,007,043	29,000,000
New Entrepreneur Scholarships	New in 2001–02		2,000,000
Bite Size	New in 2001–02		2,000,000
Total		4,882,827,512	5,492,516,000
SUMMARY		2000–2001	
FEFC		3,545,427,525	
TECs		826,792,118	
DfES		235,607,869	
Administration		275,000,000	
Summary Total		4,882,827,512	

Child Abuse

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the work of the Children and Young People's Unit; and what work it has done since November 2001 relating to combating child abuse. [72912]

Mr. Denham: The Children and Young People's Unit works to ensure the coherence of Government policies that affect all children and young people who are under 19, and particularly those who are most vulnerable. In November 2001, it launched a consultation exercise to develop an over-arching strategy for all policies and services for children and young people in England. The framework for the strategy includes looking to secure the objective that children should live in a safe and secure community, where they are protected from abuse. The Unit is now considering the responses to the consultation in preparing a final strategy for publication later this year.

In its work within Government, the Unit works closely with the Department of Health and other Departments on matters relating to child abuse.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will take measures to oblige school governing bodies to give children who are the victims of alleged grossly inappropriately sexual behaviour and indecent assault and their parents the opportunity to give their account of such incidents. [73492]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Schools must have formal procedures for dealing with any complaints about the curriculum and special educational needs, and we recommend as a matter of good practice that governing bodies should also have procedures to ensure that other complaints are dealt with properly.

In dealing with complaints and in making provision for complaints procedures, the governing body should ensure that the person complaining is given fair treatment and in particular, a chance to state their case. Decisions and reasons for them should be given in writing and the person complaining should be informed at the same time of any rights of appeal they have if they wish to take the matter further. We already give guidance to governing bodies and schools about their role in helping to protect children from abuse, and about dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff. This is contained in Circular 10/95 *"Protecting Children from Abuse: The Role of the Education Service"*

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will issue guidelines to school governing bodies and local education authorities clarifying at what point grossly inappropriately sexual behaviour becomes indecent assault. [73493]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A decision as to at what point grossly inappropriately sexual behaviour becomes indecent assault is a matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service and not for the education service. Those agencies must decide whether, in any particular case, alleged behaviour is within the scope of the offences as defined in the Sexual Offences Act 1956.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will instruct school governing bodies to which allegations of grossly inappropriately sexual behaviour or indecent assault have been reported to give due consideration to any ongoing police or Child Protection Unit investigations. [73494]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department's Circular 10/95 *"Protecting Children from Abuse: The Role of the Education Service"* already advises that schools should refer any allegations of abuse to the police or child protection agencies. Schools should liaise with those agencies in accordance with the procedures laid down by their local Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC).

In the case of allegations of abuse against a member of staff, the Circular also advises that a police or social services investigation will take priority over an internal investigation by the school. An internal investigation running alongside a police or child protection agency enquiry is not likely to be good practice and should be held in abeyance pending the outcome of the external investigation. Due consideration can then be given to any allegations and to any disciplinary action by the school or governing body.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will take measures to ensure that school governors receive instruction on the handling of allegations of grossly inappropriately sexual behaviour and indecent assault. [73495]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department has already issued advice to Local Education Authorities and schools about dealing with allegations of abuse in Circular 10/95. *"Protecting Children from Abuse: The Role of the Education Service"*. The Circular advises that schools and colleges should have procedures that are in accordance with the child protection procedures established by the Area Child Protection Committee and, where appropriate, by the local education authority, including procedures to be followed if a member of staff is accused of abuse.

This guidance is under review following the introduction of a new statutory duty regarding child protection in the Education Act 2002. The new duty will require governing bodies of schools or Further Education institutions and LEAs to have arrangements for ensuring that their functions are carried out with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and to have regard guidance by the Secretary of State (or the National Assembly for Wales) in making such arrangements. We are planning to consult on this guidance in the autumn, and we hope that all those with an interest, including teachers, governors and LEAs, will contribute to that consultation.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will amend Circular 10/99 to provide greater protection for child-victims. [73496]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department's guidance about child protection is contained in Circular 10/95 *"Protecting Children from Abuse: The Role of the Education Service"*. This is under review and we will be consulting about new guidance in the autumn. We will take full account of any representations we receive about this issue.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Accessible Communications Services

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure that OFCOM takes into account the rights and needs of disabled consumers and reflects best practice on access standards. [67782]

Dr. Howells: In carrying out its functions OFCOM must have regard to the needs of people with disabilities—this is stipulated in Clause 3(2) of the draft Communications Bill.

BBC (Fair Trading)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport who takes responsibility for the enforcement of the BBCs fair trading commitment. [70380]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The BBC's overall fair trading commitment is approved and enforced by the Board of Governors, but many of its detailed elements directly reflect the requirements of UK and EC Competition law and to that extent are enforceable by the competition authorities.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received concerning the future enforcement by Ofcom of the BBC fair trading commitment, [70381]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* ITN has made representations that the future enforcement of the BBC's fair trading commitment should lie with OFCOM rather than the BBC Governors.

Princess of Wales (Memorial)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) when she will make a decision on the memorial fountain to Diana Princess of Wales; when work on the memorial fountain will commence; and when it is expected that the memorial fountain will be on view to the public; [71243]

(2) what her latest estimate is of the cost of the memorial fountain to Diana, Princess of Wales; and if she will make a statement. [71244]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* I announced on 31 July that I had selected Gustafson Porter to design the fountain to commemorate the life of Diana, Princess of Wales. Work to design and construct the fountain will begin immediately. £3 million has been allocated to the project. I expect the main part of the memorial to be in place by the sixth anniversary of her death; the establishment of the surrounding landscaping will take longer.

Area-Based Initiatives

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list for each area-based initiative for which her Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71458]

Mr. Caborn: My Department's main Area-Based Initiative is Space for Sport and Arts. Space for Sport and Arts was launched in October 2000. Bids were invited from Local Education Authorities for funding for capital projects aimed to improve primary school arts and sports facilities for dual school and community use. All the funding for successful projects had been committed by March 2002.

Space for Sport and Arts is a collaboration between DCMS, DfES and three National Lottery Distributors—Sport England, the New Opportunities Fund and the Arts Council of England. Funding for Space for Sport and Arts is £130 million—£75 million from the Government's Capital Modernisation Fund and £55 million from the National Lottery.

The amounts budgeted by My Department for Space for Sport and Arts and the total expenditure in 2000–01 and 2001–02 is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Budget*	*Spend*
2000–01	15.0	0.013
2001–02	60.0	0.579

The amount originally budgeted for Space for Sport and Arts that was not spent by the end of 2001–02 is £74.408 million. All of these funds are committed and, under end-year flexibility arrangements, will be available in this and later years to pay for the projects being assisted.

My Department provides grant-in-aid to a number of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs); some of these NDPBs run their own Area-Based Initiatives which appear on the Regional Coordination Unit website.

Additionally the Department is involved in several area-based initiatives funded through the Lottery.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by her press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in her press office in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [70550]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* In July 1997, there were nine press officers in my department, including two working part time. In July 2002, there were seven press officers, all full time. A small number of informal, short term secondments to the press office took place during that time.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in her Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72253]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1373.

BBC Digital Services

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the BBC's expenditure on digital services. [72450]

Dr. Howells: This is a matter for the BBC Governors. However, the licence fee settlement, in February 2000, recognised the BBC's role in driving digital take-up and in acting as a "benchmark of quality" during the development of digital services. It included a commitment by DCMS to a rolling programme of reviews of all the new digital services, the first such review being of BBC News 24.

Sport England

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the projected amount of World Class Performance funding to be distributed by *(a)* UK Sport and *(b)* Sport England in (i) 2002–03, (ii) 2003–04, (iii) 2004–05 and (iv) 2005–06. [72469]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The projected amount of funding to be distributed by UK Sport on their World Class Performance Programme, together with the projected investment by Sport England in their World Class Programmes is show in the following table.

	2002–03	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
UK Sport	£24m	£24.1m	£24.3m	£24.3m
Sport England	£5.1m	£42m	£42m	£42m

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport the amount of World Class Performance funding to be distributed by *(a)* UK Sport and *(b)* Sport England in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [72470]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The amount of World Class Performance funding awarded by Sport England and the actual expenditure incurred by UK Sport for the years requested is as follows.

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
UK Sport	£16.5m	£20.1m	£22.5m
Sport England	£16m	£8.8m	£6.7m

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in her Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72647]

Dr. Howells: The information requested on the Department is in the following table:

Financial year	*2001–02*	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*
No. of temporary staff	90	97	108	N/a	N/a
Temporary staff costs	£409,742	£387,296	£456,230	£491,203	N/a
as a percentage of total staff costs	2.79	2.82	3.47	4.16	N/a

The relevant information for 1997–98 is not held electronically in the format requested and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Similarly, information on number of temporary staff for 1998–99 is not readily available and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost

Better Public Buildings Initiative

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will name the projects the departmental Design Champion has sponsored as part of the better public buildings initiative; and if she will make a statement on the extent of her personal input in respect of each. [73642]

Dr. Howells: The DCMS design champion, my right hon. and Noble Friend the Minister for the Arts (Baroness Blackstone) has personally sponsored three projects; a DCMS conference, "Taking the Lead: Good Design in Public Buildings" at which she delivered a keynote address; Stonehenge, one of the UK World Heritage sites where DCMS led by my right hon. and Noble Friend is driving work forward to protect the site and improve the visitor experience; and the BBC project to redevelop Broadcasting House and the surrounding area. My right hon. and noble Friend met Richard MacCormac, the architect for the project on Monday 29 July 2002.

Public Buildings Action Plans

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Departments have produced better public buildings action plans. [73532]

Dr. Howells: The following departments have produced action plans:

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Department for Work and Pensions

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Department for Trade and Industry

Lord Chancellor's Department

Home Office

Ministry of Defence

Department of Health

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The former Department for Transport and Local Regions was preparing an action plan for publication on 5 July. Due to the recent departmental changes, new action plans will now need to be prepared for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport. The Department for Education and Skills plan to publish an Action Plan later this autumn.

Portable Antiquities Scheme

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she intends to take to ensure that the Portable Antiquities Scheme is continued and that her Department will provide long term financial support for the scheme. [73146]

Dr. Howells: In March this year, my right hon. and noble Friend, the Minister of State for the Arts, announced at the Standing Conference on Portable Antiquities that DCMS would be funding the Scheme's pilot posts for the following financial year, and promised that the longer term funding of the Scheme would be considered in the light of the outcome of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Spending Review.

My right hon. Friend's Review has delivered additional resources for DCMS, over the three year period of the review, which will provide real-term growth at an average of 3.5 per cent. a year. Decisions on the allocation of these additional resources will be taken over the coming months

BBC

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department expects to receive the Office of Fair Trading's report on the BBC's UK programme quotas; and if she will make a statement. [72338]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* I understand that the Office of Fair Trading is preparing its report and that it will be available shortly.

Tourists

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tourists visited *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Taunton Deane in (i) 2001 and (ii) 2000. [73273]

Dr. Howells: South West Tourism reports that in 2000 Somerset received a total of 12.09 million visits, including day visits, of which 2.18 million were made to Taunton Deane.

Detailed visit data are not yet available for 2001. However, United Kingdom Tourism Survey data show that 3.32 million visits involving stays of one or more nights were made to Somerset in 2001.

Job Locations

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many jobs under the remit of her Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by her Department, the BBC and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72739]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Sports and Recreation

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans she has to assess the national provision of sports and recreation facilities; and if she will make a statement; [73301]

(2) what plans she has to assess the national provision of open space available for informal sport and recreation; and if she will make a statement. [73302]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has announced our intention to establish an England-wide database of sports facilities. Information on sports facilities in England is currently held by a variety of organisations and a single database will enable more strategic Government investment in those areas and facilities which are most important. My Department is currently assessing the scope, content and cost of the proposed database and how the project will be taken forward.

Sport Action Zones

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will announce the next round of sport action zones; and if she will make a statement. [73013]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 252W. The position has not changed since then.

Sport Expenditure

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the expected increase in expenditure on sport as a result of the Spending Review is; and if she will make a statement. [73303]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 24 July by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr Thomas), *Official Report*, columns 1164–1165W.

Ministerial Design Champions

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the projects the Ministerial design champions for each Government Department are sponsoring. [73413]

Dr. Howells: *Department for Culture, Media and Sport:*

Taking the Lead: Good Design in Public Buildings conference at the Imperial War Museum held in October 2001

Stonehenge visitor reception building

BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place

Home Office: HQ Building Marsham Street

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: Old Rectory Farm, Surrey

Drayton Farm, Warwickshire

Treasury: Arrangements for sponsorship of the ongoing GOGGS project by a Treasury Minister will be finalised in the autumn

Ministry of Defence: MOD Main Building PFI

Tidworth Primary Health Care Centre Functional Prime Contract

Department for Work and Pensions: Hartshead Square, Sheffield

DWP will also announce another project this autumn

Lord Chancellor's Department: Exeter Combined Courts

Manchester Civil Justice Centre

East Anglia PPP

Department of Health: University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Trust

Leicester City West Primary Care Trust

Manchester Children's University Hospital NHS Trust

Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust

Foreign and Commonwealth Office: New British embassy and ambassador's residence Warsaw

The Department for Trade and Industry and the Department for Education and Skills will announce projects in the autumn.

The new design champions for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport have not yet confirmed which projects they will be sponsoring.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fireworks

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with fireworks retailers regarding the period in which fireworks can be sold. [65642]

Mr. Wilson: Discussions are to take place shortly with fireworks retailers regarding the voluntary period of sale.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with fireworks manufacturers regarding the banning of aerial bangers. [65522]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has had discussions with representatives of fireworks manufacturers who have put in place a voluntary ban on the supply of air bombs to the consumer.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has had from animal welfare organisations regarding the sale and use of fireworks. [65523]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received representations from animal welfare organisations regarding the sale and use of fireworks, but this is essentially a matter for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) under the Protection of Animals Act 1919.

Arms Trade

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* United Kingdom, *(b)* EU, *(c)* international and *(d)* other regulations apply to the trading of arms. [72389]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of arms from the UK is controlled under the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939. EU arms embargoes are controlled by means of regulations made under the Treaty establishing the European Communities and are directly applicable to all Member States. Licensing, enforcement and penalties for breach of the regulations are provided for in national legislation made under the European Communities Act 1972. United Nations (UN) arms embargoes are implemented in the UK under the UN Act 1946 and the Import, Export and Customs Power (Defence) Act 1939.

In addition, the Export Control Bill contains new powers allowing controls to be imposed on trading of arms between overseas countries.

F-16 Fighters

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what written assurances have been given in the course of issuing an export licence regarding the use in third countries of UK navigation and targeting equipment supplied to the US makers of F-16 fighters. [68936]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Apart from the normal end user documentation, written assurances are normally only sought in relation to the use of equipment exported from the UK in connection with weapons of mass destruction.

Export Licences

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many revocations of arms export licences to Israel there were in each month since January 2000; in what categories they were; and if she will make a statement. [71386]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) where licences were revoked or whose coverage was amended by the exclusion of Israel, for items on the Military List, in each month between January 2000 and June 2002, is set out in the table below.

Individual licences might cover a range of items with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the tables in the total of all of the relevant ratings.

	ML1	ML2	ML4	ML6	ML9	ML10	ML11	ML13	ML22	PL5006	PL5017
January 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
February 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
March 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
April 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
May 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
June 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
July 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
August 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
September 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
October 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
November 2000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
December 2000	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
January 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
February 2001	-	-	1	2	2	3	2	3	1	-	2
March 2001	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	-
April 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
May 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
June 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
July 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
August 2001	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	-	1	-	2
September 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
October 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
November 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
December 2001	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
January 2002	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
February 2002	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
March 2002	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
April 2002	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
May 2002	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
June 2002	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

During the same period no Standard Individual Export Licences, for items on the Military List, were revoked where the end user was in Israel. In addition, Israel has been removed from the coverage of one Open General Export Licence, for items on the Military List, details of which are available from the Libraries of the House.

Since the publication of the 2001 Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls it has come to light that two OIELs for items on the Military List, which were revoked or whose coverage was amended by the exclusion of Israel, were inadvertently omitted from the Report.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value is of licences granted for equipment on the military and dual-use lists to *(a)* Georgia, *(b)* Uzbekistan, *(c)* Kyrgyzstan, *(d)* Tajikistan, *(e)* Turkey, *(f)* the Philippines, *(g)* Kenya, *(h)* Ethiopia, *(i)* Djibouti, *(j)* Bahrain, *(k)* Oman, *(l)* Jordan, *(m)* Yemen, *(n)* India, *(o)* Pakistan and *(p)* Israel in each month from January 2001 to June 2002; and if she will make a statement. [65098]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The total value of SIEL applications for which a licence was issued, is published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which are placed in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published soon.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many individual export licence applications have been outstanding for more than *(a)* three months; *(b)* six months and *(c)* one year. [66504]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation (ECO) was processing 1,584 applications for individual export licences as of 1 July 2002, of which 312 Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications and 84 Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) applications had been outstanding for more than three months; of those, 51 SIEL and 42 OIEL applications had been outstanding for more than 6 months; and, of those, 19 SIEL and 13 OIEL applications had been outstanding for more than one year.

As a result of its programme of continuous improvement the ECO has, in partnership with other Government Departments, substantially reduced the time taken to process all applications, and in particular the most complicated and sensitive cases. The number of SIEL applications taking more than 6 months to finalise is less than a third of the figure at the same time last year.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many arms export licences were *(a)* requested and *(b)* granted for exports to Belarus (i) from 1997 to August 2001 and (ii) since August 2001; and if she will make a statement. [73163]

Mr. Wilson: Between 2 May 1997 and 31 August 2001 no Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications and 4 Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) applications were received, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Belarus. Between 1 September 2001 and 15 July 2002 no SIEL applications and 2 OIEL applications were received, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Belarus.

The number of SIELs and OIELs issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Belarus, between 2 May 1997 and 31 December 2001 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 Annual Reports are available from the Libraries of the House.

Between 1 January 2001 and 31 August 2001, no SIELs or OIELs were issued, for items on the Military List, where the end user was in Belarus. Between 1 September 2001 and 15 July 2002, no SIELs and 1 OIEL was issued, for items on the Military List, where the end user was in Belarus.

This information should be considered in light of the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 870–71.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many arms export licences were *(a)* requested and *(b)* granted for exports to the Ukraine (i) from 1997 to August 2000 and (ii) since August 2000; and if she will make a statement. [73162]

Mr. Wilson: Between 2 May 1997 and 31 August 2000, 14 Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications and 8 Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) applications were received for items on the Military List, where the end users were in the Ukraine. Between 1 September 2000 and 15 July 2002, 4 SIEL applications and 5 OIEL applications were received for items on the Military List, where the end users were in the Ukraine.

The number of SIELs and OIELs issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in the Ukraine, between 2 May 1997 and 31 December 2001 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 Annual Reports are available from the Libraries of the House.

Between 1 January 2000 and 31 August 2000, 2 SIELs and no OIELs were issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in the Ukraine. Between 1 September 2000 and 31 December 2000, 1 SIEL and 1 OIEL were issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in the Ukraine. Between 1 January 2002 and 15 July 2002, no SIELs and 2 OIELs were issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in the Ukraine.

This information should be considered in light of the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 870–71.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many arms export licences were *(a)* requested and *(b)* granted for exports to (i) Georgia and (ii) Russia in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [73164]

Mr. Wilson: The number of Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications and Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) applications received, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Georgia and Russia, in each year since May 1997 is as follows:

	Georgia		*Russia*	
	Siel	*Oiel*	*Siel*	*Oiel*
2 May 1997 to 2031 December 1997	1	1	12	3
1998	4	0	20	2
1999	2	0	10	2
2000	2	1	18	3
2001	0	2	18	4
1 January 2002 to 15 July 2002	0	0	8	1

The number of SIELs and OIELs issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Georgia and Russia, in each year since May 1997 are published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports in Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls are available from the Libraries of the House.

Between 1 January 2002 and 15 July 2002, no SIELs and 2 OIELs were issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Georgia. During that same period 5 SIELs and 4 OIELs were issued, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Russia.

This information should be considered in light of the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs Roche) to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 870–71.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the types of equipment for which export licences were granted on 8 July in respect of exports to the USA of defence-related equipment; and if she will state the countries to which this equipment will be exported from the USA once incorporated into other defence equipment. [69112]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The types of equipment for which Standard Individual Export Licences and Open Individual Export Licences were issued on Monday 8 July 2002, where the end user or consignee was in the United States of America, for items on the Military List, was as follows:

ML1
ML2
ML6
ML7
ML9
ML10
ML15

In addition, USA is a permitted destination on certain Open General Export Licences covering the export of items on the Military List; copies of all Open General Export Licences are placed in the Libraries of the House.

In taking decisions to issue these licences, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, acting through the Export Control Organisation, took into account the information available to her on the stated final destination of defence-related goods into which the goods licensed for export from the UK were to be incorporated, where relevant. These potential final destinations were Israel,

Japan and the United Arab Emirates. It should however be noted that final decisions on exports of defence equipment from the United States of America are for the US exporter and Government.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) on 8 July 2002 *Official Report*, columns 650–52W.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many open individual export licences are valid for the export of arms to India. [66502]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* 81.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many individual export licence applications for the sale of armaments to India have been received by her Department since 1 May; and how many have been approved. [66503]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* 118 Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications and no Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) applications for items on the military list.

38 SIELs and 1 OIEL for items on the military list were issued.

Export Credit Guarantees Department

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 659W, on the Export Credit Guarantees Department, if she will break down the money paid under the Export Credit Guarantees Department *(a)* in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 1998–99 and (iii) 1997–98 to the USSR (Civil Misc), *(b)* in 2000–01 to Jordan, *(c)* in 1999–2000 to the Philippines (Civil Aerospace), *(d)* in 1999–2000 to Indonesia (Civil, Misc), *(e)* in 1999–2000 to Indonesia, (Civil Aerospace) and *(f)* in 1999–2000 to Indonesia (Defence) by (A) the company and (B) the project involved; and if she will make a statement. [70553]

Ms Hewitt: The table below lists the companies that ECGD has paid claims to and the types of project involved for the requested markets, years and sectors. ECGD seeks to recover claims payments on all cases whether through rescheduling agreements in the Paris Club or negotiations with individual buyers.

Year	*Market/Sectors*	*Companies*	*Projects*
1997–98	USSR/ Civil Misc.	Bank of Scotland	Electronics plant
		HSBC Bank plc	Food processing plant
		Lloyds TSB	Line of Credit (*3)
		Morgan Grenfell and Co Ltd	Modernisation and Expansion of Acrylic Fibre plant
		National Westminster Bank	Polypropylene plant
			Steel Mill
			Train Information System
			Vehicle design and development
		Total Claims	£53.2m
1998–99	USSR/Civil Misc.	Bank of Scotland	Electronics plant
		HSBC Bank plc	Line of Credit (*3)
		Lloyds TSB	Modernisation and Expansion of Acrylic Fibre plant
		Morgan Grenfell and Co Ltd	Polypropylene plant
		National Westminster Bank	Steel Mill
			Train Information System
			Vehicle design and development
		Total Claims	£46.1m
1999–2000	USSR/Civil Misc.	Bank of Scotland	Electronics Plant
		Deutsche Bank AG London	Line of Credit
			Polypropylene Plant
			Vehicle design and development
		Total Claims	£37.8m
2000–01	Jordan/Civil Misc.	J Henry Schroder and Co Ltd	Communications Equipment
		Total Claims	£3.0m
1999–2000	Philippines/Civil Aerospace	Credit Agricole Indosuez	Civil Aircraft
		Total Claims	£14.9m
1999–2000	Indonesia/Civil Misc.	ANZ Banking Group Ltd	Airport Security Equipment
		Barclays Bank plc	Bridges
		Citibank International plc	Coal Handling Terminal
		HSBC Bank plc	Diesel Generators
		Lloyds TSB	Hydroelectric Power Station
		West LB	Navigational Aids
			Radio Studio Equipment
			Search and Rescue Equipment
			Ship Loading Equipment
			TV Studio
	Vacuum Metalliser	Total Claims	£15.3m
1999–2000	Indonesia/Civil Aerospace	Barclays Bank plc	Civil Aircraft
		Citibank International plc	Flight Simulator
		Lloyds TSB	
		Total Claims	£14.5m
1999–2000	Indonesia/Defence	ANZ Banking Group Ltd	Airforce Training Facility
		HSBC Bank plc	Armoured Vehicles

Year	Market/Sectors	Companies	Projects
		Kleinwort Benson Ltd	Flight Simulator
		Lloyds TSB	Ground to Air Missiles
		West LB	Line of Credit (*3)
			Military Aircraft
			Military Communications Equipment
			Naval Simulators
			Radar Equipment
		Total Claims	£149.8m

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations are being carried out by the ECGD following the judgment of Judge Cullinan in Lesotho, on British companies that received ECGD support; and whether they have referred this case to the relevant external investigatory body. [72919]

Ms Hewitt: We are aware that there has been a guilty verdict delivered against Masupha Sole, the former Chief Executive of the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority. However, the consortia involved in the Lesotho Highlands Water Project have not been convicted of corruption.

ECGD is currently seeking information from the companies who were supported by ECGD and who were members of the consortia concerned, and continues to closely monitor developments in relation to Court action in Lesotho.

ECGD is fully committed to eliminating bribery and corruption. On 28 September 2000, ECGD strengthened its own anti corruption measures—pre-empting the OECD Export Credit Group's Action Statement on Bribery and Officially Supported Export Credits and reflecting the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total was of *(a)* premiums and *(b)* claims paid by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in the financial year 2001–02. [72606]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The following table details premiums earned and claims paid for 2001–02.

I have also included the total of recoveries and interest received by EGCD in the same period.

	£ million
Premium Earned	76.9
Claims Authorised	250.0
Recoveries and Interest	503.5

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total of *(a)* premiums earned, *(b)* recoveries received, *(c)* claims paid and *(d)* interest support was in Export Credits Guarantee Department operations in relation to their defence business in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [72504]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The following table details Claims Paid, Premium Earned and Claims Recovered in respect of ECGD's support for defence related business in 2000–01 and 2001–02. The cost of interest rate support has been estimated on the proportion of ECGD credit business constituted by defence related business.

Information on amounts received through Paris Club rescheduling has not been included as it is not held on sectoral basis and this cannot be readily determined. It is likely that taking account of these amounts would improve the position in respect of defence business cashflow.

Year	Premium Earned £ million	Claims Paid £ million	Estimate of Interest Rate Support	Claims Recovered £ million
2000–01	38	181	4	0
2001–02	10	125	7	0

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what ECGD support has been granted for *(a)* fossil fuel, *(b)* renewable energy and *(c)* nuclear power projects, broken down by country, in each year from 1997 to 2002. [72864]

Ms Hewitt: The following table details amounts of ECGD business issued for power projects within the fossil fuel, nuclear and renewable energy sectors, between 1997 and 2002 to date.

Fuel Type	Market	£ million 1997–98	£ million 1998–99	£ million 1999–2000	£ million 2000–01	£ million 2001–02	£ million Total
Fossil	Abu Dhabi		8				8
	Anguilla		1				1
	Brazil		16				16
	China	32	291	1			323
	Cyprus		5				5
	Dominican Republic				23		23
	Hong Kong	73			1		74
	India		20	89	48		157
	Indonesia	39					39
	Israel					11	11

Fuel Type	Market	£ million 1997–98	£ million 1998–99	£ million 1999–2000	£ million 2000–01	£ million 2001–02	£ million Total
	Malaysia			770			770
	Mexico			3	77		80
	Oman			10	25		35
	Saint Kitts and Nevis		8				8
	Taiwan			128	18		146
	Turkey		22		34		56
	Vietnam			24			24
	Zimbabwe	9					9
	Egypt			6			6
	Philippines			72			72
	Bangladesh				7		7
Nuclear							
	China		58				58
Renewable							
	Thailand	6					6
	Total	159	428	1103	233	11	1933

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 21 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 588W, on ECGD, if she will break down the figures for the financial years *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 by country. [72926]

Ms Hewitt: The following table details premium earned and claims paid by ECGD in respect of defence business by country for financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

Figures for claims indicate the year of payment rather than the year of underwriting. The majority of these claims have been subject to internationally brokered rescheduling agreements and it is expected that these claims will be recovered in full over time.

The calculation of the premium amount for defence business in 1999–2000 has fallen slightly (from £27 million to £25.4 million) since ECGD was first asked to provide this figure. This is due to a combination of improved systems for reporting on business by industrial sector and movements in sterling–US dollar exchange rates.

	1999–2000			2000–01
Claims	Indonesia	151	Indonesia	180
	Zimbabwe	1	Zimbabwe	1
	Total	152		181
Premium	Turkey	10.2	South Africa	29.2
	Saudi Arabia	8.9	Saudi Arabia	6.6
	Oman	3.2	Oman	1.6
	Malaysia	[illegible]6	Greece	0.6
	Kuwait	[illegible]0.5		
	Total	25.4		38.0

Investment Grants

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are used to ensure that her Department is able to recover any grants awarded to overseas companies in connection with investment projects in the UK, that subsequently became repayable. [73650]

Alan Johnson: It is normal to seek a legally binding guarantee of repayment from the parent company. Other conditions may be sought depending on the circumstances of the specific case.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the grant money paid to Viasystems Inc group in respect of its North Tyneside plant has been recovered. [73651]

Alan Johnson: We have recovered £3 million to date, in two tranches. The Department is in continuing discussions over the remaining sum.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ask the Comptroller and Auditor General to review the safeguards in place to ensure that grant moneys paid to overseas companies can be recovered if they subsequently become repayable, with special reference to the case of Viasystems Inc. [73652]

Alan Johnson: The Comptroller and Auditor General is an independent officer of the House. If the hon. Member wishes such a review to be carried out, I suggest he raises the matter with him.

General Agreement on Trade and Services

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact of GATS on trade and industry. [66868]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The purpose of the GATS is to promote economic growth through the expansion of trade in services. Quantifying the benefits of services liberalisation is difficult, but the available estimates suggest positive benefits for both developed and developing countries in particular.

For the United Kingdom, liberalisation of services markets should be of particular benefit. The UK is the second largest exporter of services in the world and fourth

largest importer. In 2001 exports of services amounted to £77 billion and imports were worth £65 billion. Services account for nearly 70 per cent. of our GDP.

We believe that liberalisation of services underpinned by effective domestic regulatory frameworks can bring benefits to developing countries. Recent studies point to the economic efficiency and welfare gains that liberalisation can bring. The World Bank estimate that services liberalisation could boost the income of developing countries by nearly $900 billion. This is nearly five times the gain the bank estimate that they would obtain from liberalisation in goods. Liberalisation of infrastructure services such as financial, telecommunications and transport services can help developing countries by fostering the efficiency and growth of other sectors of their economies.

Under the GATS countries can decide in which sectors and to what extent they wish to liberalise or privatise and when they think it would be beneficial for them to do so. The EC has made clear in its liberalisation requests that it is not seeking the dismantling of public services nor the privatisation of state owned companies.

Business Investment (Somerset)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government have ta[illegible] attract business to *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Taunton since 1997. [73259]

Alan Johnson: In 1998 the Government launched the Regional Development Agencies and in 1999 the South West Regional Development Agency (SW RDA) was established. Prior to that the West of England Development Agency had responsibility for attracting inward investment to Somerset and Taunton.

Since the inception of the RDA the Agency's Inward Investment team, working closely with the Somerset Local Strategic Partnership, has secured a number of successes bringing inward investors into Somerset.

Date	*Company*	*Origin*	*Location*	*Cap Ex £(m)*	*New*	*Safe*	*Partner*	*Project*	*Source*
Aug 1998	Edwards Pearson	Holland	Somerset	2	10	90	SEP	162	Direct
Dec 1998	Logoplaste	Portugal	Bridgwater	6.00	70	0	SEP	463	INUK
Aug 2000	Equitea	Kenya	Taunton	0.00	5		SEP	1123	INUK
Nov 2000	Flight Visions UK Ltd	USA	Langport	0.02	5	0	SEP	1183	Direct
Nov 2000	Chickmaster	USA	Bridgwater	1.00	0	70	SEP	524	INUK
Jul 2001	Seamap	Singapore	Somerset	0.05	12	0	SEP	1108	Direct
Total to date: 6					£9.07m	102	160		

Somerset has also benefited from investment under the Single Regeneration Budget (£1.2m) and the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative (£50K).

Investment (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance has been given to manufacturing companies in Coventry since 1997. [66158]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* It is not feasible to cite details of individual grants that have been awarded to Coventry based manufacturing companies. However, the following grants and assistance have been available for all or part of the period in question:

Regional Selective Assistance; Enterprise Grants; New SMART; SMART; SPUR; Regional Enterprise Grants—including Regional Innovation Grants and Regional Investment Grants; and the European funded "Accelerate" scheme. Additionally, modernisation and diversification support has been offered to businesses as a result of the recommendations of the Rover Task Force.

Farm Bill

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations the EU is making to the US on the likely effects of the proposed Farm Bill; and if she will make a statement. [67597]

Ms Hewitt: Both HMG and the Commission are in frequent dialogue with the US Government at all levels about the US Farm Bill (the "Farm Security and Rural Investment Act 2002"). We have made clear to the US Government our considerable disappointment with the Farm Bill, especially in the context of the Doha Development Agenda, which committed all WTO members to substantial reductions in trade-distorting support.

The US believe the Farm Bill is compatible with their World Trade Organisation Commitments and have stressed their intention to remain fully engaged in the Doha negotiations. We will continue to strongly encourage them to do so.

Local Loop Unbundling Initiative

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the number of local loops that will have been unbundled by July; and what estimate she originally made when the local loop unbundling initiative was announced. [68043]

Stephen Timms: At the end of June 2002, over 600 lines had been unbundled. It is difficult to forecast how many unbundled local loops there will be by a given date as this is dependent on operators' own commercial rollout plans. Past attempts to forecast volumes of unbundled loops have proved unreliable for a number of reasons, not least the prevailing market conditions and the decision by operators to target the business rather than residential market.

Fraud

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received with regard to *(a)* introducing regulation in an attempt to prevent fraud by corporate executives, and *(b)* introducing penalties to further discourage fraud by corporate executives; and if she will make a statement. [69080]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's White Paper, published on 16 July, in response to the Company Law Review includes a proposal for codification of directors' general duties, with civil remedies for breach of director's duties if a workable scheme can be devised. The White Paper also proposes extending the existing offence for misleading the auditors of a company and proposes a new duty on directors to volunteer information to auditors where such information is necessary for the performance of auditors' duties.

In addition the Enterprise Bill provides for the introduction of criminal sanctions for individuals who enter into cartel agreements.

Foresight Projects

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the crime prevention panel of the Foresight projects. [69814]

Ms Hewitt: The Foresight Crime Prevention Panel was set up in April 1999 to run for three years. The Panel considered the likely developments in science, technology and society up to 20 years ahead and how these might impact on crime. The aim was to try and help UK Government, law enforcement, business, science and society prepare for the future.

In December 2000 the Panel published a report "Turning the Corner" which included five key recommendations for change. The Panel spent until March 2002 taking forward these recommendations, the three key outputs were:

a framework for a national e-crime strategy for the Home Office.

a wide range of research projects. Many of these will assist the Home Office in its future strategy on business crime: the impact of crime on business; the scope for a crime-proofing code of practice for manufacturers; the incentives needed for the adoption of such a code; and the new crime threats from e-tailing.

a benchmarking research project which reviewed scientific research on crime prevention in the UK and identified capability gaps. This has paved the way for proposals for a dedicated programme of scientific research, led by the Home Office, to support crime prevention.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for future funding of the Business Information Crime System operating under the Foresight initiative. [69815]

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for future funding of the Business Information Crime System operating under the Foresight Initiative. [71216]

Ms Hewitt: DTI has no current plans for further funding of the Business Information Crime System (BICS), beyond the life of the current BICS research project. The project is expected to complete by June 2003.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the crime prevention panel of the Foresight projects. [71225]

Ms Hewitt: The Foresight Crime Prevention Panel was set up in April 1999 to run for three years. The Panel considered the likely developments in science, technology and society up to 20 years ahead and how these might impact on crime. The aim was to try and help UK Government, law enforcement, business, science and society prepare for the future.

In December 2000 the Panel published a report "Turning the Corner" which included five key recommendations for change. The Panel spent until March 2002 taking forward these recommendations, the three key outputs were:

a framework for a national e-crime strategy for the Home Office.

a wide range of research projects. Many of these will assist the Home Office in its future strategy on business crime: the impact of crime on business; the scope for a crime-proofing code of practice for manufacturers; the incentives needed for the adoption of such a code; and the new crime threats from e-tailing.

a benchmarking research project which reviewed scientific research on crime prevention in the UK and identified capability gaps. This has paved the way for proposals for a dedicated programme of scientific research, led by the Home Office, to support crime prevention.

Animal Testing (Cosmetics)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the position Her Majesty's Government will take on the EU Cosmetics Directive at second reading and conciliation in the European Parliament. [69719]

Mr. Wilson: At the Internal Market Consumers and Tourism Council on 26 November 2001 the UK voted in favour of the Common Position text. The Common Position text includes a marketing ban linked to Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) accepted and published alternatives to animal tests. The text also contains a full test ban for finished cosmetic products and a testing ban on ingredients once internationally validated alternatives to animal testing are available. The UK will enter conciliation discussions from this position. The Government's objective is to encourage the adoption of a text which takes account of the European Parliament's concerns in relation to animal welfare, and which is both consistent with our WTO obligations and designed to withstand challenges within the WTO.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons Her Majesty's Government voted against *(a)* a complete marketing ban on new animal-tested cosmetics and *(b)* a full ban on animal testing for cosmetics in the EU at the Council of Ministers; and if she will make a statement. [69720]

Mr. Wilson: The reasons why the Government voted against *(a)* a complete marketing ban on new animal-tested cosmetics and *(b)* a full ban on animal testing for cosmetics in the EU in favour of the Council Common position text were set out by my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition, Consumers and Markets during the course of the debate in European Standing Committee C held on 13 March and published in the Parliamentary Debates *Official Report* of the same date. The Government's objective is to encourage the adoption of a text which takes account of the European Parliament's concerns in relation to animal welfare, and which is both consistent with our WTO obligations and designed to withstand challenges within the WTO.

Business Link Inquiry Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the operating costs have been of the Business Link Inquiry Service. [70197]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Under the Small Business Service Gateway programme, small businesses are able to access business support services and advice via a number of channels—by calling the Business Link National Enquiry Line on 0845 600 9 006; by logging on to the www.businesslink.org website; or by directly contacting their local Business Link. These channels and the supporting IT systems and infrastructure became operational from April 2001 and are delivered collectively under a single managed service contract.

The operating costs for the Business Link National Enquiry Line are part of the overall costs of the SBS Gateway programme. In the first year these consisted of a service charge of £3.75 million together with variable costs of approximately £770,000. Business Link Enquiry Service costs cannot be disaggregated from these figures.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries per month the Business Link Inquiry Service has handled since its launch. [70196]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* From April 2001 the number of telephone enquiries has run at an average of 4,860 per month. From April 2002 with the introduction of the automated call routing technology monthly volumes are now averaging 4,980. The website www.businesslink.org receives 100,000–150,000 visits each month from more than 30,000 individuals. An average of 356 email enquiries per month are also received.

Additionally, in the last year almost 43,000 clients per month were assisted by their local Business Link.

Strategic Training for Apparel and Textiles Programme

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to secure the continuation of the Strategic Training for Apparel and Textiles programme after June 2002. [72205]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Strategic Training for Apparel and Textiles (STAT) programme offers financial support to companies in the textiles and clothing sectors towards the costs of training in support of strategic business change and is currently being funded by the Department for Work and Pensions.

I am aware of a number of expressions of support from the industry for the programme to continue and the Department is currently in discussion with the Department for Education and Skills, which now has lead responsibility for training of the employed, to consider the case for a follow on programme.

Textile and Clothing Industry

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance has been given to the textile and clothing industry since 1997; what measures are in place to help the textile and clothing industry develop faster and more environmentally-friendly techniques; and what proposals her Department has to support the exports of the textiles and clothing industry's products. [70128]

Stephen Timms: The Government has provided almost £83 million of financial assistance to the UK textiles and clothing industry since May 1997, devoted to capital investment, innovation, exports, design and marketing, e-commerce, supply chain management, technical textiles and training and development. A key element of this assistance has been support for a Textiles and Clothing Industry Forum Adaptation programme, designed to improve the speed, efficiency and quality of the UK textile and clothing supply chain.

The UK textiles and clothing industry has already capitalised on the DTI's BIO-WISE programme which encourages companies to exploit the environmental benefits of biotechnology and also the Envirowise programme which provides practical environmental advice to businesses, focusing on resource efficiency and clean technology measures. In collaboration with CBWT, (the Confederation of British Wool Textiles), DTI is supporting a project to predict the effect of textile chemicals on the aquatic environment aimed at reducing effluent emissions at source.

Textile and clothing companies are eligible for the full range of export advice and assistance from Trade Partners UK, including assistance under the Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad (SESA) scheme. This scheme helps them attend and exhibit at key overseas trade fairs and exhibitions. The value of support for clothing and textiles events under the SESA scheme in 2001–02 was £3,740,732.

End-Of-Life Vehicles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who will be responsible for the end-of-life vehicles from 2007 for cars that have *(a)* been stolen in foreign countries and imported into the UK where they are sold through the second hand market and *(b)* brought into the UK as grey imports; and if she will make a statement. [70717]

Mr. Wilson: Final decisions have not yet been taken on the precise nature of the arrangements which will be introduced to implement the End-of-Life Vehicles Directive in the period from 2007. Those arrangements will need to deal properly with the totality of the vehicle waste stream in accordance with the terms of the Directive.

End-of-Life Vehicle Directive

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to increase the *(a)* number and *(b)* capacity of centres that can be registered as approved to treat vehicles according to the End-of-Life Vehicle Directive; and if she will make a statement. [73137]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment intends to publish for consultation later in the year draft regulations relating to Article 6 of the Directive. These will set out a regime for operators to acquire the necessary permits to carry out treatment of end-of-life vehicles, and will transpose the requirements of Annex I of the Directive into national law.

In time, only facilities permitted under this regime will be able to treat end-of-life vehicles and issue the "Certificates of Destruction" required by the Directive. As this network of facilities develops, we shall monitor closely its ability to deal properly with all end-of-life vehicles arising in the UK.

Motor Vehicle Distribution

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the location ban clause in the European Commission's proposal for motor vehicle block exemption for motor vehicle distribution. [71363]

Mr. Wilson: The European Commission adopted a new cars block exemption regulation on 17 July. The regulation will come into force on 1 October this year, but with a transitional period of one year for all provisions except that on the location clause ban. The introduction of this provision has been delayed until 1 October 2005.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the European Commission's proposals for a new motor vehicle block exemption for motor vehicle distribution. [71362]

Mr. Wilson: The European Commission agreed a new block exemption for the sale of new cars and car servicing on Wednesday, 17 July. The new block exemption will replace the existing one, which is due to expire on 30 September this year, but will be subject to transitional arrangements.

The Government has welcomed this improvement on the current regime. The reform should mean more choice and fairer prices for consumers, and greater competition and innovation in both the retail and after-sales sectors. The new block exemption is also good for business, with dealers being freer to determine how they run their businesses.

While we very much welcome the changes on new car sales and on car servicing and repair, the delay in the introduction of the freedom for dealers to open in new locations, which will not come into effect until 2005, is disappointing. We would have liked this to happen sooner, as we made clear to the Commission. Nevertheless, we welcome the fact that it will happen automatically in 2005, without a further review.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason an explanatory memorandum on the new block exemption in relation to motor vehicle distribution was not produced before it was adopted by the Commission. [71655]

Mr. Wilson: The motor vehicle block exemption is a European Commission regulation, not a Council of Ministers regulation. The Scrutiny Committees do not routinely scrutinise Commission measures, so documents relating to proposals for Commission legislation are not automatically deposited, and Departments are not expected to produce explanatory memoranda in every case. In this particular case, the Chairman of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Select Committee requested an explanatory memorandum on 3 July, and this was submitted to the Committee on 10 July.

Accountancy and Audit Regulator

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who the members of the co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accounting issues are; which organisations they represent; what their accountancy qualifications are; what accountancy bodies they belong to; what the dates of meetings are; what the accountancy connections are of individuals and parties they have invited to comment; and whether the minutes will be published. [70713]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Details of the members of the Co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accounting issues and of the parties they invited to comment on their work are given in its Interim Report, which was published on 24 July 2002.

These individuals were invited to be members of the Group by virtue of their roles in their organisations. No information is held about their qualifications or details of membership of particular bodies.

The Group has met three times to date: on 11 April, 11 June and 17 July 2002. The minutes of its meetings will not be published. However, the Group's Interim Report has been published, and its Final Report will also be published in due course.

Mail Logistics Ltd.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received on the activities of Mail Logistics Ltd. [70831]

Stephen Timms: The Department has received no such representations.

Galileo

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates have been made by her Department on the extent to which the Galileo satellite navigation system will duplicate services available under the Global Positioning System. [70709]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Transport on 24 July, *Official Report*, column 1270W.

Universal Bank

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the numbers of customers for the Universal Bank in *(a)* 2003, *(b)* 2004, *(c)* 2005, *(d)* 2006 and *(e)* 2007. [70846]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Government has an operating assumption of 3 million card accounts at the Post Office but there will be no cap and no eligibility criteria. Numbers could therefore vary according to customer demand and the systems are being designed to cope with a range of customer numbers.

Regional Aid

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when a decision will be taken on the future of the enterprise grant tier 3 programme of regional aid. [71300]

Alan Johnson: The enterprise grant scheme is being considered as part of the wider review of DTI business support. Any further changes to the geographical coverage of the scheme will not be decided until after the end of the wider review.

Enterprises Initiatives

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the percentage take up has been of each of her enterprise initiatives in the past three years. [71668]

Nigel Griffiths: DTI promotes enterprise and assists enterprises in many ways. These are set out in "The Government's Expenditure Plans report for 2002–03 to 2003–04" (Cmnd 5416).

Business Link Operators (BLOs) assisted almost 245,000 separate businesses during 2001–02 this represents a penetration rate of almost 14 per cent. In addition, BLOs helped on average almost 21,000 pre-starts.

Since October 1999, around 8,500 pre and early start businesses have received support from BLOs to assist them to reach their high growth potential.

The Small Business Service supporting 96 Phoenix Development Fund projects in disadvantaged areas and amongst under-represented groups with a budget of £30 million. So far over 8,700 people have been assisted, enabling the start-up of over 400 new enterprises and creating or safeguarding more than 1,600 jobs.

SBS has supported over 800 (a record number) new Smart projects this year, worth over £34 million. The Scheme provides grants to help research and develop technologically innovative products and processes or buy external consultancy to improve their use and exploitation of technology. Smart now contributes half a billion pounds to the economy annually (source: Smart Evaluation published October 2001); and

Finally, The Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme, which offers guarantees on loans to small firms with viable business proposals that are unable to obtain conventional finance because they lack security to offer against a loan, passed the £3 billion lending mark earlier this year. Since the start of the Scheme in June 1981 over 81,000 loans have been guaranteed.

A quarterly Management Information Report is routinely copied to the Libraries of the House. This report includes the remit and usage of all SBS enterprise initiatives.

Business Start-Ups

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the annual cost of initiatives to encourage new businesses in rural areas in each year since 1997. [71661]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service (SBS) is providing special help for start-ups and micro-businesses through the network of Business Link Operators. This includes businesses in rural areas.

SBS is, spending £3 million over 2 years through the Development Fund For Rural Renewal, to help rural business communities that are hard hit by the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease.

Business Link Operators have provided access to a range of advice and support services on average to 100,00 different start-ups and established businesses per quarter in the last 3 years.

Since October 1999, some 8,000 pre and early start businesses have received support from Business Link Operators to assist them in reaching their high growth potential.

In 1998–99 SBS spent £103 million, in 1999–2000 £118 million, in 2000–01 £172 million and in 2001–02 £154 million, on Business Link programme expenditure in all areas. SBS will be spending over £164 million in 2002–03.

We do not hold figures for 1997–98. These figures are from the Expenditure Plans Reports.

Graduate Businesses

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many programmes her Department has initiated since 1997 aimed at encouraging graduates to establish their own businesses. [71670]

Nigel Griffiths: Since 1997, the DTI has initiated a comprehensive programme of support for knowledge transfer from the science base that includes amongst its objectives promotion of entrepreneurship and business awareness within universities, including encouraging graduates to establish their own businesses. The knowledge transfer programme includes:

Science Enterprise Challenge—encouraging the teaching of entrepreneurship (established 1999)

University Challenge—providing seed funding for commercialisation of research (established 1999)

The Higher Education Innovation Fund—fostering links between universities and business (established 2001).

These schemes are complemented by Research Council support and DTI programmes of longer standing, which strengthen links between universities and business and may lead indirectly to the establishment of new businesses.

Welsh Manufacturing

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with her colleagues in the Welsh Assembly Government concerning Welsh manufacturing. [71766]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has had discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales covering a wide range of issues, including manufacturing in Wales. He, in turn, has regular meetings with the First Minister of the Welsh Assembly Government. Officials from my Department and the Welsh Assembly Government have also had many discussions on matters of mutual interest, including manufacturing in Wales.

European Telecommunications Standards

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports the Radio Agency has assessed about the role of members of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute's working group on Digital Information Standards activities which added value to Motorola Europe's patent applications in this field; and what implications this will have for the cost of future licence fees payable to Motorola. [68063]

Stephen Timms: The Radiocommunications Agency is a UK member of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute and in common with other members of ETSI, its responsibilities would not extend to carrying out an assessment of the role of other members of the group.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the implications for the UK digital communications industry of applications made by Motorola Europe supported by Motorola USA for patents on technologies offered to and adopted by the European Telecommunications Standards Institute's Digital Information Interchange Systems Standards group. [68066]

Stephen Timms: The Department of Trade and Industry supports the European Telecommunications Institute's policy on Intellectual Property Rights but is not in a position to comment upon the impact of patent rights belonging to individual companies. However, the Radiocommunications Agency is aware of discussions currently taking place within ETSI on the value of essential IPR in a standard and the value of contributions given by members in the development of those standards. The Digital Information Interchange Systems project is seen as a means to promote spectrum efficiency within the Private Business Radio Industry and the Agency would wish to see it develop for the benefit of industry, manufacturers and the users of business radio.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports the Radio Agency has assessed on Motorola Europe's licence fee policy for the use of the common technologies employed in pursuit of DIIS standards. [68064]

Stephen Timms: It is not the role of the Radiocommunications Agency to assess the commercial practice of companies or organisations in their operation of fees policy relating to Intellectual Property Rights held by those organisations.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the implications of recent Motorola Europe patent activity for the prospects for the participation of small-scale UK-owned telecommunications companies involved in the creation of the European Telecommunications Standards. [68062]

Stephen Timms: The Department of Trade and Industry supports the European Telecommunications Institute's policy on Intellectual Property Rights that has been established for some time but is not in a position to comment upon the impact of patent rights belonging to individual companies. However, the DTI supports moves towards digital technology and would encourage all companies, not least small companies, to take advantage of opportunities arising from the introduction of this technology.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports the Radio Agency has assessed about the Chairman of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute's work in establishing Motorola Europe's role in the authorship and application for patents for the technologies applicable to companies in the Digital Information Interchange Standards group. [68065]

Stephen Timms: The Radiocommunications Agency is a UK member of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute and in common with other members of ETSI, its responsibilities would not extend to carrying out an assessment of reports relating to the work of a Chairman of an ETSI group in this respect.

Broadband

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what initiatives her Department has to extend the availability of broadband internet provision to rural Somerset; and if she will make a statement. [73260]

Stephen Timms: We are working with the Broadband Stakeholder Group to help industry increase availability and take-up of broadband throughout the country.

As part of this strategy, we have provided £30 million to the RDAs and DAs to help develop innovative solutions for extending networks into areas considered commercially unattractive. The South West RDA received £3.78 million for such projects, details of which can be found on the DTI web site.

On top of this we are acting to improve the business case for service providers in rural areas by examining how the public sector can most effectively procure its own broadband. On June 26, I announced my intention to establish a new Regional Broadband Unit. Its purpose will be to stimulate economic development and enhance the delivery of public services through extending broadband services at the regional and local level.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of households in the Portsmouth, South constituency have access to broadband lines; and if she will make a statement. [72673]

Ms Hewitt: Broadband services by one or more of ADSL, cable and wireless are available to around 66 per cent. of the population. Satellite broadband is available throughout the country.

A map showing geographical availability of broadband services can be found in the UK Online Annual Report [http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/champions/anrep_menu.htm].

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of homes can access ADSL broadband services; and what plans she has to ensure an increase in ADSL broadband services. [72394]

Ms Hewitt: At the end of May 2002, ADSL was available to 66 per cent. of households. We are working with the Broadband Stakeholder Group to help industry increase availability and take-up of broadband in general.

As part of this strategy, we have provided £30 million to the RDAs and DAs to help develop innovative solutions for extending networks into areas considered commercially unattractive. On top of this we are acting to improve the business case for service providers in rural areas by examining how the public sector can most effectively procure its own broadband.

As a result of the Government's policy of promoting greater competition in broadband services, prices for broadband in the UK are now as cheap as in France, Germany and the US, following recent wholesale price cuts. Taking DSL alone, prices fell by 39 per cent. between January and June, meaning that UK prices are cheaper for DSL than in France and Germany.

More recently, I announced my intention to establish a new Regional Broadband Unit. Its purpose will be to stimulate economic development and enhance the delivery of public services through extending broadband services at the regional and local level.

OFCOM

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the consultancy work being carried out by Towers-Perrin into the structure of OFCOM for her Department was put out to competitive tender; and if she will make a statement. [72225]

Stephen Timms: A consortium of consultants, led by Towers Perrin and assisted by Ernst and Young and Differentis, is currently working on a wide range of organisational issues, including OFCOM's structure, as part of the preparations for the new regulator. This work was subject to full competitive tender in line with Government and EC requirements, following publication of a Notice in the Official Journal of the European Communities. The outcome of the tendering process was also published in the Official Journal.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultation is taking place with the radio industry about the future structure of OFCOM. [72226]

Stephen Timms: The radio industry is engaged in regular meetings with the Communications Bill Team and the existing communications regulators and has had informal discussion with the OFCOM Transition Team. Formal consultation on OFCOM structure and other organisational arrangements will be a matter for the OFCOM Chairman and Board, once they are in post.

Newspaper Circulation

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 18 July, ref. 70135, what information she has on the percentage of circulation that the five leading newspaper groups hold in *(a)* regional evening papers, *(b)* regional morning papers, *(c)* local weeklies and *(d)* local weekly freesheets. [72307]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The available information is as follows:

Company	*Total sales or distribution per week (per cent.)*	*Daily or Sunday titles sales or distribution per week (per cent.)*	*Weekly titles sales or distribution per week (per cent.)*
Trinity Mirror	24.0	24.3	23.6
DMGT	21.3	31.2	9.0
Gannett	14.1	8.7	20.7
Johnston Press	7.7	4.7	11.4
RIM	4.6	5.3	3.7
Total	71.7	74.2	68.4

Source:

Table 3.1 "Top 20 publishers of regional/local newspapers in the UK, 2001", from the Competition Commission's report "Johnston Press plc and Trinity Mirror plc: A report into the proposed merger", Cm 5495, May 2002. Since the data were compiled, Johnston Press has acquired RIM.

Periodicals

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from the Periodical Publishers' Association on proposed changes in the charging system for postage of periodicals. [72084]

Stephen Timms: The Periodical Publisher's Association wrote to me on 19 July. Changes to the charging system for postage are a commercial matter for Consignia within the regulatory framework laid down in the Postal Services Act 2001. I understand that the Association is in discussion with the company on this issue.

Consignia undertook the consultation with customers and trade associations about the introduction of a new pricing system which takes into account the size of an item and I understand that the company is now assessing the responses to the consultation. If the company does wish to proceed, it will make a submission to the Postal Services Commission and the postal consumer body, Postwatch. The Commission will have to approve any proposals and will follow their own consultation process before agreeing to any major changes in the way mail is priced.

National Transmission System

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made to Ofgem with regards to the proposed changes to the auction system for capacity to the National Transmission System at St Fergus. [72558]

Mr. Wilson: The arrangements for allocating entry capacity into the National Transmission System are specified in Transco's Network Code. The Network Code is the property of Transco and the shippers for which Transco conveys gas; it is regulated by Ofgem, which adjudicates on proposed amendments to the Code. My Department has regular contacts with Transco, shippers and Ofgem, to discuss Network Code matters of common interest. The details of such discussions are commercially confidential.

Digital Services

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* conditions and *(b)* restrictions will be placed on the BBC and Crown Castle in their promotion of digital television via marketing strategies. [69075]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the ITC and the BBC's Board of Governors and is subject also to the provisions of UK and EU competition policy.

Benefit Payments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research has been compiled on the cost savings relating to the changeover of benefit payments from payment book to ACT; with what results; and if she will make a statement. [70192]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 806W by the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Corruption

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date the ECGD obtained the judgment by Judge Cullinan in Lesotho in the bribery case against Masupha Sole; and how they obtained it. [72580]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD received a copy of the Judgement on 3 July 2002. This was obtained by the British High Commission in Maseru from the Secretary to Justice Cullinan

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many allegations of corruption the ECGD has received, and how many of these allegations it has referred to, the *(a)* Serious Fraud Office, *(b)* National Criminal Intelligence Service and *(c)* Scotland Yard in the last three years. [72587]

Ms Hewitt: In the last three years ECGD has received three allegations of corruption, and one has been referred to the SFO. None has been referred to NCIS or Scotland Yard.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the ECGD has investigated bribery allegations in the deal it between BAe Systems and the Government of Qatar; and whether it has referred this case to the relevant external investigatory body. [72586]

Ms Hewitt: No allegations have been received by ECGD, although the Department is aware of allegations in the press. Matters connected with these assertions were investigated by the Jersey authorities and ECGD responded to enquiries made of it by the Jersey authorities.

Bujagali Dam (Uganda)

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the ECGD received an application from the company, NOR-ICIL in relation to the Bujagali Dam in Uganda; and if she will make a statement. [72581]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has no record of any application for cover in respect of the Bujagali Dam and has issued no guarantees in respect of the project.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what grounds the application to the ECGD for support for the Bujagali Dam in Uganda was refused. [72584]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has no record of any application for cover in respect of the Bujagali Dam and has issued no guarantees in respect of the project.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what corruption allegations the ECGD were informed of at the time of the application for support for the Bujagali Dam in Uganda; and whether such allegations involved British companies. [72585]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has no record of any applications for cover in respect of the Bujagali Dam and has issued no guarantees in respect of the project.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which company was the lead contractor on the application made to the ECGD for the Bujagali Dam in Uganda. [72583]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has no record of any application for cover in respect of the Bujagali Dam and has issued no guarantees in respect of the project.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether NOR-ICIL was named as a contractor on an application she received with regard to the Bujagali Dam in Uganda. [72582]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has no record of any application for cover in respect of the Bujagali Dam and has issued no guarantees in respect of the project.

Anglo-Irish Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when and where Ministers in her Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72698]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 20 June, *Official Report*, column 533W.

Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings her Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72713]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* There are regular and frequent meetings between my Department and the Scottish Executive, at both Ministerial and official levels, on policy issues which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Your Guide Pilot

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government's evaluation of the Your Guide pilot will be completed; and if she will make a statement. [73234]

Stephen Timms: The final evaluation was completed on time at the end of June and was published on 23 July.

Petrol Retailers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many petrol retailers *(a)* are in operation and *(b)* have been closed and sealed since 1990, broken down by (i) oil company sites, (ii) main retailer sites, (iii) supermarket sites, (iv) smaller retailer sites and (v) other unbranded sites; and if she will make a statement. [72506]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* There were 12,201 petrol retailers operating at the end of last year (2001) compared with 19,465 sites in 1990.

Total sites closed since 1990 is 7,264, of which 5,085 are oil company sites, while 1,452 are from the main retailers.

No supermarket sites have closed, as they have been steadily increasing in numbers. We do not have a breakdown between categories smaller retailer and unbranded sites, however the total for this category is 727.

The data used were from the Institute of petroleum (IP) annual "UK Retail Marketing Survey" (last published in March of this year).

University Business Start-Ups

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she collated on the performance of the companies that were spun out of universities in 1999–2000. [73130]

Ms Hewitt: The first survey of Higher Education Business Interaction carried out in 2001 showed that 199 companies were spun out from universities in the academic year 1999–2000, compared to an average of 70 each year for the previous 5 years. In 1999–2000, UK universities identified one spinout for every £8.6 million of research expenditure, compared with one spinout for every £13.9 million in Canadian Universities in 1999, and one spinout for every £53.1 million in the US. The Survey also covered employment, turnover and equity value of spinouts established by universities but responses were incomplete and raised concerns about the burden associated with collecting this data. A modified second survey currently underway seeks a build on data previously collected to provide a more systematic overview of exploitation performance across the higher education sector.

Science and Discovery Centres

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with other Departments about the funding of science and discovery centres; and if she will make a statement. [72322]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* My noble Friend the Minister for the Arts at DCMS called a meeting to discuss science and discovery centres on 18 July 2002 with my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for Science and Innovation and my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for Early Years and School Standards at DfES.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to assist the funding of science and discovery centres; and if she will make a statement. [72323]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Government has currently no plans to assist the funding of science and discovery centres. The Millennium Commission, together with the Wellcome Trust and the Wolfson Foundation, on Monday launched a £33 million fund for science centres and museums to allow them to renew or replace high quality science, education and technology exhibitions.

Biotechnology Research Projects

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what biotechnology research projects in *(a)* agriculture and *(b)* biomedics have been supported by her Department; and what level of public investment has gone into them in each of the last three years. [73239]

Ms Hewitt: DTI has not funded any biotechnology research projects in agriculture. The Department has provided £5 million of funding under the Applied Genomics LINK programme, which was launched in 2000, together with £10 million funding from the Research Councils, to assist the exploitation of genomics for healthcare applications. In addition, a substantial part of the £25 million *Harnessing Genomics* programme, launched by DTI in 2001, is providing support for industrially relevant R and D in key underpinning technology areas, including bioinformatics and nanobiotechnology.

Miners' Compensation

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* minimum, *(b)* maximum and *(c)* average final compensation settlements made to date in respect of (i) VWF and (ii) COPD are. [72924]

Mr. Wilson: The figures are:

Full and Final Settlement	*COPD*	*VWF*
Minimum	£5	£200
Maximum	£372,115	£53,185
Average	£6,823	£7,687

Abandoned Vehicles

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cars were recorded as having been *(a)* abandoned and *(b)* scrapped in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [73138]

Mr. Wilson: Local authorities are responsible for dealing with abandoned vehicles and DEFRA currently holds no central records of the number of vehicles abandoned each year. However, it estimates that some

350,000 were abandoned in the United Kingdom in 2000. Information on the number of abandoned vehicles removed by local authorities has been collected for the first time in DEFRA's 2000–01 Municipal Waste Management Survey which will be published in August.

In its three most recent annual reports, the Automotive Consortium on Recycling and Disposal (ACORD) has estimated that the following numbers of vehicles were scrapped: 1.8 million (1998), 1.8 million (1999), 2.0 million (2000).

Telephone Exchanges

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which telephone exchanges in Somerset have been converted to DSL; and what plans there are to convert the remaining exchanges. [73258]

Stephen Timms: At the end of May 2002, ADSL was available to 66 per cent. of households in the UK. A map showing geographical availability of broadband services by one or more of ADSL, cable, wireless and satellite can be found in the UK Online Annual Report [http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/champions/anrep_menu.htm].

We are working with the Broadband Stakeholder Group to help industry increase availability and take-up of broadband throughout the country. As part of this strategy, we have provided £30 million to the RDAs and DAs to help develop innovative solutions for extending networks into areas considered commercially unattractive.

We are acting to improve the business case for service providers in rural areas by examining how the public sector can most effectively procure its own broadband. On June 26, I announced my intention to establish a new Regional Broadband Unit. Its purpose will be to stimulate economic development and enhance the delivery of public services through extending broadband services at the regional and local level.

Telecommunications Masts

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many telecommunications masts in the United Kingdom there are; and what measures are taken by the Telecommunications Agency to ensure that these are mapped and recorded. [73368]

Stephen Timms: There are approximately 26,000 transmitter sites in the UK. The "Sitefinder" Mobile Phone Base Station Database at www.sitefinder.radio.gov.uk is a national database of mobile phone base stations and their emissions. The database is managed by the Radiocommunications Agency, an Executive Agency of the Department of Trade and Industry, on behalf of Government. The database provides information on all operational, externally sited, cellular radio transmitters in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The database is updated every three months from information provided by the cellular operators. It should be noted that only operational transmitters, i.e. those that are actually transmitting, are included on the database. Consequently, sites that are currently going through the planning process, are in the process of being built, or are yet to be switched on, will not be found on the database.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will establish a nationwide audit of telecommunications masts. [73371]

Stephen Timms: Last year the Rdiocommunications Agency completed an audit across the UK of 100 masts on school grounds. This year they are carrying out a further audit of masts near to schools and hospitals. Details of the audit and results for last year and those completed so far this year are available on the Agency's website at www.sitefinder.radio.gov.uk. The audit results indicate in every case levels of radiation far below those specified in the guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection

Compulsory Purchase Orders

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many compulsory purchase orders each regional development agency is helping to promote; what the total gap funding is each has awarded; and what the total investment of each has been in direct development in each year since their formation. [73409]

Alan Johnson: Most RDAs do not promote their own Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs), and therefore there is no associated gap funding or investment, although this may change in the future. The exceptions are South of England Development Agency (SEEDA), London Development Agency (LDA) and North West Development Agency (NWDA).

For SEEDA, the number of CPOs is one (with no gap funding nor any investment in development yet).

For LDA, there are no CPOs yet (with no gap funding nor any investment in development), but two CPOs are being considered.

For NWDA, three CPOs have been made (total gap funding of £2.4 million and a total investment of £2.7 million over the years 1999 to 2002) and a further two CPOs are being considered.

Privatised Utilities

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received from *(a)* the DTLR, *(b)* the SRA, *(c)* the Office of the Rail Regulator and *(d)* train operating companies with regard to the Government's policy towards the independence of the economic regulators of the privatised utilities. [62304]

Mr. Wilson: None.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of employers breaking the minimum wage regulations were reported in the last two years. [73361]

Alan Johnson: The number of employers found not to be paying the minimum wage in the last two years is as follows:

Year	
2000–01	2,119
2001–02	1,937

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to increase the level of penalties for employers who fail to comply with the minimum wage legislation; [73366]

(2) what the maximum penalty is that can be imposed on employers who fail to comply with the minimum wage legislation; [73362]

(3) what the average penalty imposed on employees was who failed to comply with the minimum wage legislation in the last 12 months; [73363]

(4) how many employers have been reported for forcing their employees to work unpaid hours beyond their contracts in the last 12 months; and what the maximum penalties are that can be imposed in such cases. [73364]

Alan Johnson: The Inland Revenue enforces the national minimum wage on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Under the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, Inland Revenue compliance officers can issue penalty notices where businesses have failed to comply with an enforcement notice in respect of the minimum wage. Penalty notices impose a financial penalty equal to twice the hourly amount of the main minimum wage rate per worker, for each day of non-payment of the minimum wage from the date that the enforcement notice was issued. Each time the main minimum wage rate is increased, the level of penalties is therefore also increased. There is no upper limit on the penalty that can be imposed on an employer.

In the year ended 31 March 2002, sixty-five Penalty Notices were issued for a total of £95,804, giving an average penalty of £1,973.90. No separate information is held on the number of minimum wage cases where employees were found to be working beyond their contracted hours.

Part-Time Workers Directive

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* one off administration costs and *(b)* ongoing recurring costs to May 2002 for the Part-Time Workers Directive were; and if she will make a statement. [73135]

Alan Johnson: The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 came into force on 1 July 2000, transposing the Part-time Work Directive into British law. Under the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Regulations which the Government published at the time, total recurring costs were estimated to be £27.4 million per year. The one off administration costs were estimated to be negligible.

Employment Law

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review the resources available for employment rights enforcement. [73367]

Alan Johnson: In October 2001, along with the Lord Chancellor, the Secretary of State announced a joint Taskforce to make recommendations on how the Employment Tribunal system can be made more efficient and cost effective. Their terms of reference include advising on the need for new investment to meet any revised service objectives and performance measures. The Taskforce have just delivered their report, which the Secretary of State is publishing today. We are now considering their recommendations, including the resource implications.

In addition, on 11 July 2002 the Secretary of State also announced a review of the operation of the Employment Relations Act 1999. This will look at the operation of the law as regards the institutions which enforce employment rights in this area.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to increase penalties for breaches of employment law. [73365]

Alan Johnson: The Employment Act 2002 provides that employment tribunals must normally vary any award made under the main jurisdictions where there is a failure on the part of either party to complete a statutory dispute resolution procedure before a tribunal application is made. The Act also provides that penalties will be increased under the main jurisdictions if an employee's written statement of employment particulars is absent or deficient. These provisions will be implemented in due course.

Limits on various payments and employment tribunal awards are varied each year in line with any changes in the Retail Prices Index, in accordance with the provisions of the Employment Relations Act 1999. In line with our previous commitments, on 11 July 2002 the Secretary of State announced a review of the operation of this Act

Sexual Harrassment

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she takes to ensure that women at work have suitable avenues to report sexual harrassment. [72856]

Ms Hewitt: The Government take the issue of sexual harassment very seriously. In employment law it is well established that sexual harassment constitutes a form of detriment under the Sex Discrimination Act.

Reporting instances of sexual harassment can be channelled through managers, personnel officers or trade union representatives. Many employers also appoint sexual harassment counsellors who are specially trained to deal with complaints.

The Government have published leaflets for employers and employees on how to avoid, how to report, and how to deal with sexual harassment. Guidance for women and men on how to report and deal with instances of sexual harassment is also available from the Equal Opportunities Commission, and the Equal Opportunities Commission can help individuals bring a complaint.

Equal Pay

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are in place to ensure that women are paid the same as men when they are in the same job. [72854]

Ms Hewitt: The Equal Pay Act 1970 makes it unlawful for an employer to pay a woman less than a man for the same job, a job rated as equivalent or a job of equal value. The Act applies equally to men and women. A booklet about the Act is available from the Government.

The Equal Opportunities Commission's (EOC) Code of Practice on Equal Pay provides practical guidance and recommends good practice to employers. It is a statutory Code, and can be referred to in Tribunal evidence.

The EOC was given extra funding to develop an Equal Pay Toolkit, aimed at helping employers to carry out pay reviews. The kit was launched on the 4 of July.

We have made funding available to Trade Unions to train their representatives to negotiate on equal pay issues in the workplace.

The Employment Act (2002) provides a new power to introduce an Equal Pay Questionnaire into the Equal Pay Act. The questionnaire procedure will help women who think they may not be receiving equal pay to request key information from their employers before deciding whether to institute proceedings. We will be consulting interested parties on the design and content of the form later this year.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action can be taken against companies that do not enforce an equal pay policy. [72855]

Ms Hewitt: The Equal Pay Act 1970 imposes an obligation to pay men and women equally for the same work, work rated as equivalent and work of equal value. While employers are not legally required to have an equal pay policy, we encourage voluntary pay reviews through, for example, the Castle Awards and the Fair Pay Champions.

Individuals who feel they are suffering pay discrimination on the basis of their gender are entitled to take a case to an employment tribunal under the Equal Pay Act.

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), which helps to enforce sex discrimination and equal pay legislation, has the power to conduct formal investigations, and to issue non-discrimination notices where, in the course of a formal investigation, it is satisfied that the Equal Pay Act is not being complied with. The EOC also has the power to provide financial or other assistance to applicants bringing a case under the Equal Pay Act and to seek preliminary findings as to whether there may have been an infringement of the Act, and apply for an injunction to restrain persistent discrimination.

Employee Regulations

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of *(a)* businesses and *(b)* employees would be excluded if those firms with up to 10 employees were exempted from regulation; and if she will make a statement. [73139]

Nigel Griffiths: Data are available for businesses with 0–9 employees at the start of 2000. The figures are for all types of regulations, including fire.

Contribution of micro sized (0–9 employees) businesses (per cent., 2000)

Businesses	*Employees*

Contribution of micro sized (0–9 employees) businesses (per cent., 2000)

Businesses	*Employees*
95.0	17.3

Source:
Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Statistics for the United Kingdom 2000, Small Business Service.

Regulations are drawn up to address specific issues. There are already a number of regulations that exempt small companies. Such exclusions are looked at on a case by case basis, and not necessarily by size of company but also turnover and other measures.

Blanket exclusions can cause their own problems when companies exceed the threshold they are expected to comply with all regulations at once.

SMEs

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employees are employed in the UK in *(a)* small, *(b)* medium sized enterprises and *(c)* in total; and if she will make a statement. [73134]

Nigel Griffiths: The latest figures relate to the start of 2000 and include full-time and part-time employment.

Employment (thousands, start 2000)

Small (0–49 employees)	*Medium (50–249 employees)*	*Total*
9,650	2,536	22,132

Source:
Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Statistics for the United Kingdom 2000, Small Business Service.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many breaches of the EC Working Time Directive have been recorded to date in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland. [72399]

Alan Johnson: We do not record "breaches", but we do collate figures relating to enquiries and complaints:

The ACAS helpline currently receives over 5,000 working time calls during a year

The Employment Tribunal Service Annual Report for 2001–02 showed that, during the period, the Employment Tribunal Service disposed of 1,632 cases that were specifically concerned with the working time entitlements (rest and paid annual leave). 169 (10 per cent.) were successful and 495 (30 per cent.) were ACAS conciliated settlements.

Since the introduction of the Working Time Regulations in 1998 (up to March this year), the Health and Safety Executive Working Time officers have dealt with 685 complaints and completed 469 investigations on the working time and night work limits. Local authority Environmental Health Departments have recorded one successful prosecution over the past two years

These figures relate specifically to GB (there are separate Regulations for Northern Ireland). There is no individual breakdown currently available for Scotland.

Machinery

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Standing Committee on the approximation of the laws of the member States relating to machinery is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66441]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon. Member is referring to the Standing Committee set up under Article 6.2 of Directive 98/37/EC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to machinery. It is anticipated that the above Committee will meet later in the year, however, dates have not been set. The UK is represented by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry. They are supported by a technical expert from the Health and Safety Executive. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in, discussions at official and Ministerial level with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

ACMs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Pressure Vessels is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55215]

Ms Hewitt: It is assumed that the question concerns the provisions of the Directive on the harmonisation of the laws of the Member States relating to simple pressure vessels 87/404/EEC. There is no provision for such a Committee in that directive.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on the implementation of projects promoting co-operation and commercial relations between the European Union and the industrialised countries of North America, the Far East and Australasia is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64919]

Ms Hewitt: The EU Committee on the implementation of projects promoting cooperation and commercial relations between the European Union and the industrialised countries of North America, the Far East and Australia is next due to meet on 24 July 2002. Relations with the European Union are the responsibility of the Parliament and Government of the United Kingdom, as Member State. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on common rules for imports of products from third countries is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64928]

Ms Hewitt: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 232–33W.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on protection against dumped imports is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64926]

Ms Hewitt: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 389W.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on defence against obstacles to trade which effect the market of the Community or a non-member country is next due to meet, whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64918]

Ms Hewitt: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 230W.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on protection against subsidised imports is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64905]

Ms Hewitt: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 389W.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Textile Committee (conventional regime) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64917]

Ms Hewitt: I refer to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 388W.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Coordinating Group for the Community regime for the control of exports of dual-use goods is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64922]

Ms Hewitt: No date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of the Co-ordination Group for the Community Regime for the Control of Exports of Dual-Use Items and Technology.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Standing Committee on technical rules and standards, including rules relating to information society services is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [64827]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee on Standards and Technical Regulations is next due to meet on 30 October 2002. The UK is normally represented by one or two officials from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for management of generalised preferences is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64920]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee last met on 3 June 2002. There are currently no plans for it to meet in the near future. The UK is normally represented by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). As the EU's Generalised System of Preferences Scheme is an international trade issue, the DTI delegates at this committee represent all of the UK. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the harmonisation of credit insurance provisions for transactions with medium- and long-term cover is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64921]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee for the harmonisation of the main provisions concerning export credit insurance for transactions with medium and long-term cover is a comitology committee covering the work of the European Council Working Group on Export Credits.

Comitology procedures only exist for a very limited number of issues, the committee meets on an ad hoc basis and the committee has had no reason to meet in the past twelve months. We are unable to anticipate if or when it might be required to meet in future.

If a meeting of the committee was convened, the UK would be represented by our delegation to the Council Working Group comprising officials from the Export Credits Guarantee Department. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on standardisation in the field of information technology is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64902]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on Standardisation in the field of Information Technology (SOGITS) has not met for over two years and there are no issues under consideration at present. Discussions are taking place to reactivate this Committee. The UK is normally represented by an official from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Standing Committee for the approximation of the laws of the Member States concerning pressure equipment is next due to meet; what the UK representation on it is; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [64825]

Ms Hewitt: Provision for such a Standing Committee is contained in Article 7.2 of the Pressure Equipment Directive 97/23/EC but this has not yet been put into effect and so the Committee has never met.

An informal "Working Group on Pressure" has been convened, however, under the auspices of Article 17 of the Directive.

Representation from the United Kingdom is led by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry. They are supported by a technical expert from the Health and Safety Executive. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at

official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the harmonisation of national legislation relating to recreational craft is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64882]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon Member is referring to the Standing Committee set up under Article 6 of the Directive 94/25 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of Member States relating to recreational craft. The next meeting is scheduled for December 2002. The UK is represented by two officials from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on implementation of the multiannual programme for enterprise and entrepreneurship, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64914]

Ms Hewitt: The next Enterprise Programme Management Committee (EPMC) is due to take place during September/October 2002.

The Multiannual programme for enterprise and entrepreneurship is not a devolved activity.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee for implementation of the Community market-access strategy is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64961]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee for the Implementation of the Community Market-access Strategy last met on 6 June 2002. Its next meeting is likely to be in the first half of 2003. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on common rules for exports of products is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64927]

Ms Hewitt: The EU Advisory Committee on Common Rules for Exports of Products last met on 8 May 2001. No date has been set for its next meeting and I believe it is unlikely to do so again in the foreseeable future. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for protection against the effects of the extra-territorial application of legislation adopted by a third country, and actions based thereon or resulting therefrom (anti-boycott) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64923]

Ms Hewitt: It was intended that a Committee for Protection Against the Effects of the Extraterritorial Application of Legislation Adopted by a Third Country and Actions Based Thereon or Resulting therefrom (anti-boycott) would be established in Brussels to assist EU companies affected by extraterritorial jurisdiction by third countries, and in particular those affected by the extraterritorial aspects of the US trade sanctions against Cuba, Iran and Libya.

Thus far, the Committee has not been convened. UK companies are obliged to inform HMG and the European Commission of any extraterritorial action taken against them, but whilst it is clear who would be responsible for representing the UK at any meeting of the Committee, in these times of improved electronic communication, it has not been necessary in practice for it to meet.

In addition, as part of the 1997 Understanding between the EU and the US, the US undertook to exempt European individuals and companies from the extraterritorial aspects of US legislation drastically reducing the number of cases occurring, thus further reducing the need for the Committee to meet.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at officials and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touched on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on restrictive practices and dominant positions is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67752]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on Restrictive Practices and Dominant Positions met on 15 July. The UK is normally represented by officials from the Office of Fair Trading, and sometimes the DTI. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on restrictive practices and dominant positions in the transport industry is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [67753]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on Restrictive Practices and Dominant Positions in the transport industry meets only when there are European Commission decisions or legislative proposals to discuss. No meetings are currently planned. The UK is normally represented by officials from the Office of Fair Trading, the DTI and the DTLR. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on concentrations between undertakings is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [67749]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on Restrictive Practices and Dominant Positions met on the 15 July. The UK is normally represented by officials from the Office of fair Trading and sometimes the DTI. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on General Authorisations and Individual Licences in the Field of Telecommunications Services is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68553]

Ms Hewitt: No meetings are currently scheduled for the EU Committee on General Authorisations and Individual Licences in the Field of Telecommunications Services.

The UK is normally represented at the Licensing Committee by two officials, one each from Oftel and the Radio Agency. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on the Implementation of Open Network Provision is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68554]

Ms Hewitt: No meetings are currently scheduled for the EU Committee on the implementation of Open Network Provision.

The UK is normally represented on the ONP Committee by three officials, one from DTI and two from Oftel. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Multiannual Community Action Plan on Promoting the Safe Use of the Internet is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68573]

Ms Hewitt: The Internet Action Plan Programme Committee is next due to meet on 28 October 2002. An official from the Department of Trade and Industry normally attends, and represents all of the UK. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the Implementation of the Multiannual Community Programme to Stimulate the Development and Use of European Digital Content on the Global Networks and to Promote Linquistic Diversity in the Information Society (e-Content) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68569]

Ms Hewitt: The Programme Management Committee met on 22 March 2002, and is next due to meet on 11 September 2002. The UK is normally represented by one official from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the Approximation of the Laws of the Member States Relating to Noise Emission in the Environment by Equipment for Use Outdoors is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68567]

Ms Hewitt: The Noise Committee met on 16 November 2001, and is next due to meet on 6 December 2002. The UK is normally represented by two officials from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on Telecommunications Procurement is next due to meet;

whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68551]

Ms Hewitt: No meetings of the Advisory Committee on Telecommunications Procurement are currently planned. Under the Cabinet Office and Scottish Executive Concordat on Co-ordination of European Union Policy Issues, UK representation falls to the relevant UK Department (in this instance the Office of Government Commerce). The Concordat requires that the Scottish Executive should be fully consulted prior to any meeting of the Committee and provides that it may send observers or, with the prior agreement of the relevant UK Department, represent the UK at meetings. To date, UK representation at meetings of this particular committee has been by officials of the Office of Government Commerce.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on Security of Information Systems is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68555]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on Security of Information Systems (SOG-IS) has not met for over three years and there are no issues under consideration at present. The UK is normally represented by an official from the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department of the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on fees, implementation rules and the procedure of the boards of appeal of the Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market (trademarks and design) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70904]

Ms Hewitt: The next meeting, which is expected to be the last in the current round aimed at agreeing detailed rules for the Community Registered Design, is due to be held on 19 September. The only officials normally attending are those who are expert on the specific issues, who come from the Patent Office.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touches on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee for co-ordination in the internal market field is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [71823]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee for Co-ordination in the Internal Market Field has several formations. The next meeting of the "general" formation is planned for 3 December, although there are meetings of the Heads of Delegations formation planned for 8 October, "Better Regulation" formation planned for 24 July and 9 October and a Heads of Co-ordination Centres formation planned for 5 November.

The DTI co-ordinates single market policy and represents the UK at meetings of this committee, except in the case of the "Better Regulation" formation where Cabinet Office (Regulatory Impact Unit) officials also attend.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee of experts on the transit of natural gas through grids is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [71824]

Ms Hewitt: There is no date for the next meeting of the Committee, perhaps because it is due to be abolished under the Commission's current proposals for liberalising the European gas market.

The Committee is and always has been made up purely of experts from the industry, so no representatives of the Scottish Executive have ever sat on it. Lattice Group plc represents the UK, including Scotland, on the Committee.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Advisory Committee on the development and reconversion of regions is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [73161]

Ms Hewitt: The next meeting of this Committee is scheduled for 25 September. My Department, which has co-ordinating responsibility for Structural Funds in the UK, sends one representative. Other departments with responsibility for the European Regional Development Fund, and the Devolved Administrations, are also invited. A representative of the Scottish Executive normally attends as an observer. On average the UK representation is three officials.

For further information regarding the Committee I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 467–68.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee of experts on the transit of electricity through grids is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [73152]

Ms Hewitt: There is no date for the next meeting of the Committee, perhaps because it is due to be abolished under the Commission's current proposals for liberalising the European electricity market.

National Grid Company plc represents the UK, including Scotland and Northern Ireland, on the Committee.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new pieces of legislation originating in the European Union were implemented by her Department in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [73136]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has implemented five EU directives so far this year. It implemented nine EU directives in 2001 and sixteen in 2000.

EU Directives

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government policy is towards the EU Hallmarking Directive; and if she will make a statement. [71867]

Mr. Wilson: The draft Directive proposing a single market in hallmarking precious metals is not the subject of current negotiations. Should they resume in future, the Government would wish to participate constructively to work for a fair outcome for business and consumers. The Department encourages key stakeholders to consider the implications of a possible Directive.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the EU Hallmarking Directive on UK assay offices; and if she will make a statement. [71868]

Mr. Wilson: The draft Hallmarking Directive has not progressed in Europe for a number of years due to unresolved difference and it is unclear whether or when it may do so. In the event of further discussions or new proposals coming forward, impact on a wide range of interests will need to be assessed, including business and consumers and others such as assay offices.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the EU directives and regulations that have been implemented through her Department in 2002; and what was the cost of each to public funds. [64989]

Ms Hewitt: Five EU directives have been implemented by DTI so far in 2002:

Directives 97/64/EC, 98/44/EC, 1999/42/EC, 1999/93/EC, and 2001/77/EC.

The cost and saving information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the EU directives relating to her Department which have been *(a)* amended and *(b)* repealed in 2002. [64939]

Ms Hewitt: The following EU directives relating to DTI have been amended or repealed so far in 2002.

Amended: Directive 76/768/EEC

Repealed: Directives 90/387/EEC, 91/396/EEC, 92/44/EEC, 92/264/EEC, 95/47/EC, 97/13/EC, 98/10/EC

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on the directives on names and labelling of textile products is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66440]

Ms Hewitt: No meeting of the EU Committee on Directives relating to Textile Names and Labelling is scheduled currently. When it does meet the UK is normally represented by one official from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of protective equipment and systems for use in explosive atmospheres is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66437]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon Member is referring to the Standing Committee set up under Article 6 of Council Directive 94/9/EC of 23 March 1994 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States concerning Equipment and Protective Systems Intended for Use in Potentially Explosive Atmospheres (the so-called ATEX Directive). The date of the next meeting of the Standing Committee is 11 December 2002.

Representation from the United Kingdom is led by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry, supported by a technical expert from the Health and Safety Executive to provide technical advice. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of pressure vessels is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66427]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) earlier today.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of electric materials used in an explosive atmosphere is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66438]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon. Member is referring to the committee responsible for adaptation to technical progress of the Directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in electrical equipment for use in explosive atmospheres set up under Article 6 of Directive 76/117/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States concerning electrical equipment for use in potentially explosive atmospheres. The committee has not met for several years and is unlikely to meet again because Directive 76/117/EEC is being superseded by Directive 94/9/EC (the ATEX Directive) and will be repealed on 1 July 2003 when Directive 94/9/EC comes fully into force.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of construction plant and equipment is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66428]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon Member is referring to the Committee on the Adaptation to Technical Progress set up under Article 4 of Directive 79/113/EEC on the approximation of laws of the Member States relating to the determination of the noise emission of construction plant and equipment. Directive 79/113/EEC has been superseded by Directive 2000/14/EC and was repealed on 3 January 2002 when Directive 2000/14/EC came fully into force. Therefore, this Committee will not meet again. However, at previous meetings the UK was normally represented by two officials from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of lifting and mechanical handling appliances is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66439]

Ms Hewitt: Directive 84/528/EEC, on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to common provisions for lifting and mechanical handling appliances, was repealed on 1 July 1999 by the Lifts Directive 95/16/EC.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of cosmetics is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66425]

Ms Hewitt: The EU Technical Adaptation Committee on the safety of cosmetic products next met on 22 July. The UK is represented by two officials from the Department of Trade and Industry. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Consignia

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what redundancy package has been agreed with Consignia; and if she will make a statement. [72507]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Redundancy packages are an operational issue for the company in consultation with the unions.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how Consignia measures and calculates its quality of service targets; and if she will make a statement. [73231]

Ms Hewitt: Targets for scheduled services and standards are set in the licence issued by the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm) and agreed between Consignia and the Consumer Council for Postal Services (Postwatch). The system for measurement of performance against those targets is a matter for the company. However independent auditors appointed by Postwatch conduct ongoing audits of the figures to ensure that the reported results are calculated correctly and are an unbiased representation of the actual quality of service. As this is an operational matter for the company I have asked Consignia's Chief Executive to write direct to the hon Member.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what costs are associated with the *(a)* formation, *(b)* printing, *(c)* publishing and *(d)* distribution of Consignia's annual report and accounts; and if she will make a statement; [72508]

(2) how many modified sub-postmasters offices have closed since 1997, listing for each year the reasons why the office was closed; and if she will make a statement; [72830]

(3) if she will make a statement on the employment status of modified sub-postmasters/mistresses; [72831]

(4) how many modified subpostmasters' offices are run by *(a)* the self-employed and *(b)* employees of Consignia; and if she will make a statement. [72840]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what tender process was used to select companies involved in non-audit services provided to the Post Office in 2001–02; and if she will make a statement; [73235]

(2) which Post Office branches will have cash machines installed by March 2003 broken down by constituency; and if she will make a statement; [73233]

(3) if she will list the charitable donations made by Consignia since 1997; and if she will make a statement; [73298]

(4) how many cash machines are installed in Post Office branches; and if she will make a statement. [73232]

Stephen Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon member.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what provision has been made by Consignia to compensate modified post offices for loss of income from ACT; and if she will make a statement. [72832]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Government is committed to the future of the post office network. £480 million has already been invested in modernisation of the post office network. In addition, the Government as owner of the Consignia Group, has taken steps to strengthen the management of the company, including the appointment of David Mills as Chief Executive for Post Office Limited who has been charged with development of a strategic plan to include widening commercial opportunities for the network.

Banking will be a central part of post offices' strategy to move forward. Universal banking services, together with Post Office Limited's plans for an expansion of network banking—the provision of counter services for ordinary current accounts—should lead to a substantial increase in the range and volume of banking at post offices, tapping into a very much larger customer base than benefit recipients alone. This should benefit subpostmasters both directly and through increased footfall, providing a major income stream offsetting the loss over time of the benefit book related revenue.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many days were lost due to *(a)* sickness, *(b)* official industrial action and *(c)* unofficial industrial action in each of the last five years; broken down by grade, by (i) Consignia, (ii) Royal Mail and (iii) Post Office Counters; and if she will make a statement. [72491]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* Postcomm and *(b)* Postwatch regarding the maintenance of the universal service obligation on the Post Office. [72802]

Stephen Timms: Ministers regularly have discussions with Postcomm and Postwatch on strategic postal issues.

The postal universal service obligation was laid down in the Postal Services Act 2000 and consists of a service provided at an affordable price determined by a public tariff uniform throughout the United Kingdom. It includes the delivery each working day to the home or premises of every individual in the United Kingdom and a collection each working day from access points, subject to the exceptions to this agreed with Postcomm.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place between the Government and Consignia to merge the services provided by "your guide" with the website www.ukonline.gov.uk; and if she will make a statement. [70518]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Post Office Limited discussed with Government a wide range of services which might potentially be offered via a Your Guide-type scheme, including the possibility of access to ukonline. My Department has worked closely with the Office of the eEnvoy on the options.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was informed of the decision to change the name of the Post Office to Consignia. [70883]

Stephen Timms: The Department was informed by the Post Office in November 2000 of the proposed name of the company that was to be designated as the Post Office company.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was informed of the proposal to charge to deliver early morning mail for small businesses receiving fewer than 20 letters per day. [70882]

Stephen Timms: The Department was informed about the level of the charge for Consignia's additional service a few days before Consignia announced that it would be running pilots of its new Tailored Delivery Service on 10 July. The service will now be trialled at £5, £10 and around £14 per week for the pilots but the Chairman of Consignia, Allan Leighton, has said that the final proposed price will be part of the evaluation of the pilots in consultation with the regulator, the Postal Services Commission, and the consumer body, Postwatch.

Sub-Post Office Closures

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with Consignia with regard to the closure of sub-post offices in Scotland. [72023]

Stephen Timms: I have met recently with Consignia executives to discuss plans for the post office network which are likely to lead to some closures as a result of the forthcoming programme to restructure the urban post office network. Any closure would need to be preceded by discussion with the subpostmaster and local consultations. The Post Office has been tasked with avoiding preventable rural closures.

Rural Post Offices

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research was *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in the last 12 months on the effect of the introduction of automated credit transfer on the future financial viability of rural post offices; and what plans she has to commission future research in this area. [70849]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Performance and Innovation Unit's report "Counter Revolution: Modernising the Post Office Network", showed that the future viability of the network was challenged by the introduction of automated credit

transfer. In December 2000, PostComm advised my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on support for rural post offices. This advice was based on research which included consideration of the impact of automated credit transfer. No other research has been commissioned into the effects of this on rural post offices in the last twelve months.

As set out in the PIU report the effect on the network will depend on the Post Office's ability to generate replacement business. We are concentrating on supporting the Post Office's efforts to build up these new business opportunities, including universal banking services, so as to mitigate the effects of the move to automatic credit transfer. We will be monitoring the situation closely as the programme unfolds. We have no proposals for other research in this area.

Post Office Card Accounts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government's target is for the number of Post Office card accounts to be operational in *(a)* 2003, *(b)* 2004, *(c)* 2005 and *(d)* 2006; what the estimated cost is to the Government of those accounts; and if she will make a statement. [72509]

Stephen Timms *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Government does not have a target for card accounts at the Post Office, rather there is an operating assumption of 3 million card accounts at the end of the benefit and tax credit migration period in 2005, but there will be no cap and no eligibility criteria. Numbers will build up over the migration period from April 2003 but the scale of that build up will depend critically on individual consumer decisions which are difficult to predict with any certainty. The Government has agreed contractual terms with the Post Office for the provision of the card account, the details of which are commercially confidential to the parties.

Solar Power

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the payback period is on available photovoltaic and other domestic solar power installations; what contribution the Government's major photovoltaics demonstration programme makes to reducing the payback period; what the comparative payback period is for solar energy technology; and what packages of financial support are available to support and promote the use of solar energy. [73192]

Mr. Wilson: The typical payback period for photovoltaic installations is 50–100 years. The major photovoltaics demonstration programme effectively halves this payback period for the purchaser by offering 50 per cent. grants on this technology. Our rationale for supporting photovoltaics is that it is a technology at a relatively early stage of development, but with significant potential for further cost reduction and for meeting our electricity needs in the future.

Solar water heating is a proven and commercial technology with a payback period of 15–20 years. No financial support is currently available for this technology through central government, although such support is currently being considered under the £10 million Community and Household renewables scheme. Support may, however, be available through local authorities and energy suppliers.

Consumer Credit

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 will be completed; what the terms of reference of that review are; and if she will make a statement. [73011]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Last July I published a consultation document *Tackling loan sharks—and more!* which set out proposals for the first major review of our consumer credit laws in almost 30 years. The aim of the review is to create a modern regulatory framework that protects consumers against loan sharks and other unfair lending practices, while enabling business to operate competitively in a modern credit market.

The priority areas for review are:-

Changing the financial limit for credit agreements covered by the Act and reviewing the categories of exemption

Amending the rules on early settlement of loans

Enabling consumers to conclude credit agreements on-line

Changing the licensing regime to target enforcement on keeping the loan sharks out of the market

Making the extortionate credit provisions more effective

Simplifying the advertising regulations, including the regulations on Annual Percentage Rates (APR's), and

Simplifying the rules on multiple agreements

In March I consulted on the first of the substantive issues—increasing/removing the financial limit. We are now considering the responses to that consultation. Further consultations on the remaining priority issues will follow during the remainder of 2002 and the early part of 2003.

Vehicle Fuel Consumption

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the intelligent motor generator technology developed by Ricardo in reducing fuel consumption in road vehicles. [72626]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 964W, by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport. The intelligent motor generator technology developed by Ricardo and other proposals from various other suppliers are currently being appraised by the DTI and DfT under the New Vehicle Technology Fund. As such an assessment of its likely benefits (to the environment) are not yet available.

Fuel Suppliers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent action she has taken with the competition authorities to ensure that a free and open market between fuel suppliers operates within the UK petrol retail industry; and if she will make a statement. [73236]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under UK competition legislation the Director General of Fair Trading is responsible for monitoring markets and investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour.

The Director General has investigated the petrol retail industry a number of times in recent years and has found it to be competitive. He has said that he will continue to monitor the market closely.

Electricity Generation (Mablethorpe)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessments she is making of the electricity generation programme now in place at Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire; how long she expects such evaluation to take place; and what plans she has to encourage further air-powered generation. [72950]

Mr. Wilson: The department does not evaluate the performance of individual wind farms.

Accreditation of wind farms and other renewable energy generating stations for the Renewables Obligation is given by Ofgem.

Wind energy, along with other forms of renewable energy, stands to benefit substantially from the introduction of the Renewables Obligation from 1 April this year. This places an obligation on electricity suppliers to supply a specified proportion of their electricity from renewable sources. The level of the Obligation is set to rise each year reaching a target of 10 per cent. by 2010, by which time its value could be up to £1 billion per year. The Obligation has been set up for a 25 year period (2002–27), providing the right climate for expansion of wind energy and renewable energy generally.

Wind energy, along with other renewables, also benefits from exemption from the Climate Change Levy.

The Government has assigned £74 million over the next three year for capital grants for offshore wind energy projects, where initial capital costs are greater, and the technology is less well established, than is the case for onshore projects.

We are encouraging a positive approach to new renewable energy proposals, including new windfarm proposals, through regional renewable energy plans and targets.

Fuel Reduction Technology

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department's policy is on providing collaboration funding for development of fuel reduction technology with British companies; and whether it is the policy of her Department to seek tenders from other European companies before awarding such funding. [72318]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* I refer the hon Member to the answer given to him on the 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 964W, by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport.

National Transmission Service

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average entry charges into the National Transmission Service were from each of the major UK gas terminals over the last year. [72557]

Mr. Wilson: The information for 3 major terminals is as follows:

p/therm	*Winter 2001–02*	*Summer 2002*	*Gas Year 2001–02*
Bacton	0.03	0.02	0.02
St Fergus	1.19	1.30	1.25
Teesside	0.34	0.19	0.26

Source:
Transco
Notes:
(i) Volume-weighted averages of prices achieved in Transco's primary auctions for entry capacity. (ii) Winter is the period from October–March (inclusive). Summer is the period from April–September (inclusive). The Gas Year runs from 1 October to 30 September.

Transco

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what statutory obligations apply to Transco. [72560]

Mr. Wilson: Transco is subject to various obligations under a range of legislation. Its main obligations of a sectoral economic nature are imposed under the Gas Act 1986 (as amended). These include obligations under section 9 of that Act: to develop and maintain an efficient and economical pipe-line system for the conveyance of gas; to comply (so far as it is economical to do so) with any reasonable request to connect premises to its system and convey gas to such premises or to connect a pipe-line system operated by another authorised transporter to its system; to facilitate competition in the supply of gas; and to avoid any undue preference or discrimination in the connection of premises or another pipe-line system to its system or in the terms on which it undertakes the conveyance of gas by means of its system.

Renewable Energy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received regarding the price imbalance exposure of *(a)* CHP and *(b)* renewable energy generators. [71582]

Mr. Wilson: On 4 April 2002 the Government Response to the Consultation on NETA and Smaller Generators of 1 November 2001 was published (http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/domestic_markets/electricity_trading/neta_resp.pdf).
Chapter 2 of the Response summarised the representations that were received, including from CHP and renewable generators or their industry associations, on a variety of issues. One of the issues in question was the risk of exposure to NETA's imbalance prices.

The DTI has also held a number of meetings with interested companies and their representative organisations. Copies of the responses to the DTI Consultation on NETA and Smaller Generators are available for viewing in the DTI library.

Wind Farms

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to take into account the cumulative effect of large numbers of wind farms in areas of outstanding natural beauty when considering planning applications. [70247]

Mr. Wilson: Planning policy guidance covering Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) already exists to protect such areas, and the Government has made it clear that AONBs should share the protection given to National Parks in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. PPG7 (for England) was accordingly amended in June 2000 so that for major projects in AONBs, consideration of planning applications should normally include an assessment of the need for the development, in terms of national considerations, and the impact of permitting it or refusing it on the local economy; the cost of and scope for developing elsewhere outside the area or meeting the need for it in some other way; and any detrimental effect on the environment and the landscape, and the extent to which that should be moderated.

Energy Industry

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by what proportion UK electricity generating capacity exceeds average peak demand in 2002. [71526]

Mr. Wilson: A UK-wide estimate of the plant margin (i.e., the proportion by which installed generation capacity exceeds peak demand) in 2002 is not currently available.

However, according to table A2.3 in Appendix 2 of "The Development of British Electricity Trading and Transmission Arrangements" (http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/docs2001/74 BETTA.pdf), which was published by OFGEM during December 2001, it was estimated that the plant margin in Great Britain was 25 per cent. in 2001–02. This was forecast to remain constant at 25 per cent. in 2003–04.

Carbon Emissions

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what she estimates the carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants underwritten by the Export Credit Guarantees Department over the past five years will be over the 10 year operating period; and what she estimates the projected carbon emission savings in the United Kingdom over the same 10 years will be. [72298]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* For coal-fired power plants underwritten by ECGD since 1997 it is estimated that upon completion total annual carbon emissions be of the order of 11.1 million tonnes.

The Government published the UK Climate Change Programme in November 2000 outlining a range of additional policies and measures that it is estimated could by 2010 reduce UK carbon emissions by 17.75 million tonnes below our projected baseline. The baseline reflects trends in energy use and the changing fuel mix in the electricity supply industry. It also includes the emission reductions expected from some policies that were introduced before the Programme was published, such as the climate change levy, the fuel duty escalator to 1999, and the 10 per cent. renewables target.

The carbon emissions from power plants are calculated using the following assumptions:

Fuel Type	*ECGD Estimated Capacity (MW)*	*CO_2 (Tonnes per year)*	*Carbon (Tonnes per year)*
Coal	11,260	40.6 million	11.1 million

It has been assumed the plants operate for 60 per cent. of the time (5256 hours per year). CO_2 emissions are calculated using the following conversion factors—Coal: 0.687 tonnes of CO_2 per MW per hour, Oil 0.417, Gas: 0.309. These are taken from The Greenhouse Gas Protocol website (www.ghgprotocol.org) and are the 1999 average values for power plants in "Economies In Transition". These are the markets where ECGD most commonly provide guarantees.

Carbon emissions are calculated by assuming that carbon makes up 27.3 per cent. of the atomic mass of CO_2.

Nickel-Cadmium Batteries

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the quantity of cadmium recovered from nickel-cadmium batteries stored in the UK; and if she will make a statement about the proposed disposal or reuse of this material. [73647]

Mr. Wilson: Waste nickel-cadmium batteries arising in the UK are primarily recycled in France.

Estimates suggest that this recycling led to the recovery of 21.4 tonnes of cadmium in 1999 and 19.7 tonnes in 2000. The recovered cadmium is suitable for reuse including the manufacture of new nickel-cadmium batteries.

Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is the Government's intention that manufacturer and retailer responsibility for waste electronic and electrical equipment under the WEE Directive will begin at the central collection point. [73646]

Mr. Wilson: The Directive is still in draft form and is undergoing the conciliation process.

Under the Common Position text, retailers are obliged to take back items of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) from private households when supplying similar replacements. This can be fulfilled in-store, upon delivery of the new item or through a third party arrangement as long as returns are not made more difficult for the consumer.

Producers are responsible for financing costs associated with WEEE at least from deposit at a central collection point. Member States have an option to place costs on producers before this. The Government has not yet decided whether this option will be used in the UK and

will consult widely on the Directive on a variety of potential implementation approaches, once a final text is available.

Nuclear Industry

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the licensing of nuclear power stations. [71550]

Mr. Wilson: I have had no such discussions.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what opinion polls her Department has initiated regarding nuclear energy since 1997; and if she will place copies of the results of such polls in the Library. [71548]

Mr. Wilson: No such polls have been conducted. The current energy policy consultation is seeking views on the role that nuclear power might play in a delivering a future energy policy and we hope that all those with an interest will make their views known.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list her Department's measures to accelerate new investment in nuclear energy. [71523]

Mr. Wilson: There are no specific measures to accelerate investment in new nuclear capacity. The PIU energy review report recommended that there are good reasons, both security of supply and low carbon, for the Government to take a positive stance on keeping the nuclear option open. We are currently consulting on this and other PIU recommendations and the results will form the basis of a White Paper to be published around the turn of the year.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has held with *(a)* BE and *(b)* BNFL officials regarding the exemption of the nuclear industry from the Climate Change Levy. [71509]

Mr. Wilson: Representations have been made by BE and BNFL about the exemption of nuclear generation from the climate change levy. This is a taxation matter for the Treasury.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to decrease the risks associated with new nuclear stations. [71513]

Mr. Wilson: The financial risk involved in building new nuclear stations would be primarily a matter for the potential investor.

The Government is concerned to ensure that the inherent risks involved in electricity generation, whatever the means, are properly controlled. We expect the nuclear power industry to meet high safety and environmental standards.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department last met *(a)* BE, *(b)* BNFL and *(c)* UKAE to discuss the nuclear industry. [71296]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Ministers and officials meet BE, BNFL and UKAEA regularly to discuss a broad range of issues and there have been meetings with representatives from each of those companies within the last month.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what representations her Department has received regarding changes in carbon emissions after *(a)* 2020 and *(b)* the closing of all existing nuclear power stations; [71520]

(2) what representations her Department has received regarding the minimisation of local opposition to the development of nuclear energy; [71551]

(3) what representations she has received on the potential of nuclear energy as a low-carbon energy source; [71528]

(4) what representations she has received from non-Governmental organisations regarding the building of new nuclear power stations; [71547]

(5) what her Department's assessment is of the strategic security of *(a)* renewable and *(b)* nuclear energy supply; [71530]

(6) if she will make a statement on the building of new nuclear power stations; [71519]

(7) what representations her Department has received regarding the level of carbon tax at which new nuclear build becomes economic; [71511]

(8) what representations she has received regarding *(a)* the speed at which renewable energy sources can be developed and *(b)* whether new nuclear build will be needed; and if she will make a statement; [71521]

(9) what representations her Department has received regarding the *(a)* environmental and *(b)* discharge implications arising from (i) lifetime extension and (ii) new construction of nuclear power stations; [71514]

(10) what her assessment is of the environmental *(a)* benefits and *(b)* dangers of nuclear energy; [71518]

(11) what her assessment is of the case for new nuclear build in the future; [71510]

(12) what her Department's plan is for stimulating public debate on *(a)* nuclear-specific risks and *(b)* carbon abatement potential. [71531]

Mr. Wilson: These are all issues on which the Government is currently taking views in its consultation on energy policy and on which our position will be set out in a White Paper around the turn of the year. The White Paper will take account in particular of the report and recommendations of the recent PIU energy review, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution report "Energy—the Changing Climate", other recent Parliamentary reports, existing Government commitments and the findings of the current energy policy consultation. The consultation is very wide-ranging and is engaging stakeholders as well as the public through a variety of innovative approaches and events. It includes consideration of the role of all generation sources including nuclear power in delivering future energy policy, and the actions that might be needed to maintain nuclear as energy option. In parallel and specifically

relevant to nuclear, the Government has also been consulting on the management of radioactive waste and DTI has recently published a White Paper on managing the public sector civil nuclear legacy.

Nuclear Power currently provides about a quarter of UK's electricity supplies. Existing stations are expected to continue to contribute to the country's energy requirements and to helping limit carbon emissions provided they do so to the high safety and environmental standards currently observed. The Government is concerned to ensure that the inherent risks involved in electricity generation, whatever the means, are properly controlled.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of nuclear generating capacity within the United Kingdom. [65004]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* The current energy policy consultation is considering the future role of all generation sources, including nuclear power, in delivering a future energy policy, submission have been requested by 13 September and we intend to issue a White Paper around the turn of the year.

Nuclear Power currently provides about a quarter of UK's electricity supplies. Existing stations are expected to continue to contribute to the country's energy requirements and to helping limit carbon emissions provided they do so to the high safety and environmental standards currently observed.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated total cost is of dealing with nuclear fuel waste. [66096]

Mr. Wilson: In the UK, the majority of spent fuel is owned by the operators of the UK's nuclear power stations—BNFL which owns the UK's Magnox stations and British Energy which owns the UK's Advanced Gas Cooled Reactors and one Pressurised Water Reactor. The cost of managing spent nuclear fuel will depend on the management option chosen by the owner of the fuel. BNFL and British Energy publish annual accounts that include information on their respective nuclear provisions. These include provisions for de-fuelling, reprocessing and the management of spent nuclear fuel.

BNFL (Fines)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the fines British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. has had to pay in each year since 2000, arising from safety and environmental breaches at *(a)* Sellafield, *(b)* Chapelcross, *(c)* Springfields and *(d)* the magnox nuclear stations. [69448]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL Ltd. have incurred fines arising from safety and environmental breaches at the sites listed for the following years:

	2000	*2001*	*2002*
a. Sellafield	£44,000	£8,000	£15,000
b. Chapelcross	£5,000	Nil	Nil to date
c. Springfields	nil	Nil	Nil to date
d. Magnox nuclear stations (excluding Chapelcross)	£38,000	£100,000	Nil to date

BNFL

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* percentage stake and *(b)* real amounts of BNFL investments in the (i) AP1000, (ii) AP600, (iii) Pebble Bed Modular Reactor and (iv) Candu 6. [69446]

Mr. Wilson: AP1000 and AP600 are designs owned by BNFL's subsidiary Westinghouse Electric Company. BNFL currently has a stake of around 20 per cent. in the PBMR, but no interest in Candu 6.

Levels of investment are a commercial matter for the company.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the meetings held in the last two years between representatives of BNFL and its subsidiaries and members of the United States Congress. [69502]

Mr. Wilson: No. Details of individual meetings of BNFL employees or representatives are a matter for the company.

Nuclear Security

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received regarding the ability of the Office for Civil Nuclear Security to vet nuclear industry personnel with access to sensitive nuclear material or information. [69451]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received no recent representations concerning vetting undertaken by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security.

Sellafield

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received regarding projected clean-up costs for the next 20 years at Sellafield after BNFL privatisation. [69504]

Mr. Wilson: The Department of Trade and Industry has not received any representations on this specific issue. However, it has recently published a White Paper "Managing the Nuclear Legacy: A Strategy for Action" which sets out plans to drive forward the clean up of the civil nuclear legacy safely, securely, cost effectively and in ways which protect the environment for current and

future generations. The White Paper seeks views on a range of issues, including those related to clean up costs. Copies are available from the Libraries of the House.

Power Stations

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received regarding the prospects for lifetime extensions of *(a)* AGR and *(b)* pressure water reactor stations. [71533]

Mr. Wilson: This is an operational matter for British Energy, subject to any regulatory requirements.

Nuclear Plant Decommissioning

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations her Department has received regarding the eventual decommissioning costs associated with proposed nuclear plants. [69449]

Mr. Wilson: None.

MOX Plutonium

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what security measures will be enforced to ensure the safe passage of the pending shipment of MOX plutonium via sea from Japan to the United Kingdom; and with whom this responsibility lies. [69134]

Mr. Wilson: The Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS) regularly review the potential threats posed to MOX shipments. They are satisfied that the thorough precautions that have been taken to prevent the theft or sabotage of this shipment are adequate. For obvious reasons, the Government is not prepared to give details of the security arrangements in place.

Public Buildings

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will name the projects the departmental Design Champion has sponsored as part of the Better Public Buildings initiative; and if she will make a statement on the extent of her personal input in respect of each. [73644]

Mr. Wilson: I am currently identifying the projects to be put forward by the DTI as sponsored projects for the Better Public Buildings initiative. I have written separately to the Regional Development Agencies and the other DTI Agencies and NDPBs and expect to announce the first DTI sponsored projects in the autumn.

I welcome the agreement by my Ministerial colleagues that all the sponsored projects put forward by Government Departments will be Rethinking Construction Demonstration Projects. They will also act as trailblazers for the new Design Quality Indicator, which has been developed by CABE and the Construction Industry Council with DTI funding. This will help to ensure that the sponsored projects will be examples of best practice in public sector procurement, design and delivery.

Departmental Report

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with reference to Target 2 on page 16 of the 2002 Departmental report, what plans she has to issue further competitiveness indicators in each of the next three years. [73132]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's Competitiveness Indicators are now available on the Department's website (http://217.154.27.195/competitiveness/index.htm), and are regularly updated with the latest data. The Department is planning to issue an update of the Competitiveness Indicators in Autumn 2002, and a full assessment in 2003, with a further update to follow during 2004.

Departmental Bodies

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs under the remit of her Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by her Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72741]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* It is not possible to provide all the information requested. Information in respect of the NDPBs for which my Department has responsibility is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The information requested for DTI headquarters and the Executive Agencies is shown on the table below. My Department does not have offices overseas.

Department/Agency	*England*	*Per cent. of Dept/ Agency*	*Greater London*	*Per cent. of Dept/ Agency*	*Northern Ireland*	*Per cent. of Dept/ Agency*	*Scotland*	*Per cent. of Dept/ Agency*	*Wales*	*Per cent. of Dept/ Agency*	*Grand Total*
DTI HQ (a)	219	5	3695	90		0	124	3	55	1	4093
Companies House (c)	4	0	10	1			35	4	941	95	990
Employment Tribunals Service (c)	633	73	143	17		0	62	7	27	3	865
Insolvency Service (c)	970	71	354	26		0	6	0	39	3	1369
National Weights and Measures Lab (c)	56	100		0		0		0		0	56
Patent Office (c)		0	2	0		0		0	922	100	924
Radiocommunications Agency (c)	167	30	361	65	6	1	12	2	9	2	555
Small Business Service (c)	213	92	18	8		0		0		0	231
Grand Total	2262	25	4583	50	6	0	239	3	1993	22	9083

Secondments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 21 June, *Official Report,* column 593W, how many people from organisations outside her Department were seconded to start work in her Department between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 2001. [72651]

Ms Hewitt: Centrally held records show that 133 inward secondments have started between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 2001.

Departmental Staff

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff were seconded to her Department in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02 from (i) KPMG, (ii) KPMG Consulting, (iii) Deloitte and Touche, (iv) PWC, (v) PWC Consulting, (vi) Ernst and Young, (vii) EY Cap Gemini and (viii) Grant Thornton; what position each held; and if she will make a statement. [70552]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Since 2000–01 we have recorded centrally the DTI grade range and posts held by inward secondees. Before 2000–01 we recorded centrally only the DTI grade range and the Directorate to which each secondee was attached. All of this information relating to the businesses listed is given in the attached table.

All secondments into the Department are subject to contractual agreements, including provisions on avoidance of conflict of interest.

Business Ethics Training

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what staff grades within her Department are given business ethics training; [70528]

(2) what amount of business ethics training she has given to her staff, broken down by how many *(a)* staff have received the training and *(b)* training days; and if she will make a statement; [70526]

(3) what companies have given her Department business ethics training in the last five years; and how much this cost; [70525]

(4) what business ethics training is given to her staff; and if she will make a statement. [70527]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Business ethics and corporate governance are discussed periodically at Board level. The Department does not provide specific business ethics training to all staff, but ensures that all are aware of the Civil Service Code (which covers Service ethics more broadly).

DTI staff working on the regulatory framework for companies, professions and employment, and on DTI policy towards corporate social responsibility, are aware of the ethical issues in these sectors. In some areas, for example in relation to auditors, the DTI has a formal role in underpinning ethical requirements. Heads of Management Unit in these areas have devolved responsibility for specialised training. This is not centrally recorded.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in her Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72255]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's answer of 24 July, *Official Report*, column 1373W.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which special advisers assist her in identifying priorities for encouraging and stimulating new businesses in rural areas. [71673]

Ms Hewitt: My special advisers offer advice to me on a wide range of policy issues, including small business matters where appropriate.

A description of the role and duties of special advisers is set down in the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers.

Public Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 8 June 2001, indicating the *(a)* length and *(b)* number of responses received in each case. [68704]

Ms Hewitt: The consultations undertaken by the Department since June 2001 are as follows:

Commission proposal for a directive on the working conditions of temporary (agency) workers.

Company Investigations: Powers for the 21 Century

Concerns about gas prices and possible improvements to market efficiency

Developing Energy Policy—Key Issues for Consultation for the White Paper

Directive 2000/53/EC on End of Life Vehicles

Directors' Home Addresses

Directors Remuneration

Discussion document on electronic signatures directive implementing regulations

Discussion Paper on a Possible Producer Responsibility Model for Used Tyres

EC Green Paper on Corporate Social Responsibility

EC Green Paper on the review of the ECMR

Employment status in relation to statutory employment rights.

Final consultation on Fixed Term Work

Flexible working

General Product Safety Directive

Guidance on applications for resolution of disputes over third party access to Oil and Gas Infrastructure

ICANN and the Management of the Internet Domain Name system

IT Security Industry in connection with the Private Security Industry Act

Joint DTI/DCMS consultation on the Draft Communications Bill

Maternity and parental leave, and paternity and adoption leave and pay

Modernising Company Law

Modernising The Consumer Credit Act 1974

Modernising trading standards

Proposal on the EU Statute for a European Co-operative Society

Proposals to Tighten Consumer Protection against Short Measure of Draught

Beer and Cider

Proposed amendments to Part-Time Workers Regulations

Proposed changes to the legislation that deals with price marking of food and drink served in bars, restaurants, and cafes

Proposed changes to the Price Marking (Food and Drink on Premises) Order 1979

Reform of EC Competition Regime

Report of the Task Force on Car Servicing and Repair

Review into the case for Government support for cleaner coal technology demonstration plant

Routes to Resolution: Improving dispute resolution in Britain

Second Consultation on Proposed Modifications to Licence Conditions and Ofgem Guidelines

Second consultation on the Directive 1999/44/EC on certain aspects of the sale of consumer goods and associated guarantees

The DTI Race Equality Scheme

The E-Commerce Directive (2000/31/EC): draft implementing Regulations and interim guidance for business

The preliminary decision to add new user groups to the approved users list in the Airwave mm02 Telecommunications Act licence

The Pressure Equipment Regulations 1999

The process for identifying the GB system operator (GBSO)

The proposed amendment to Directive 94/62/EC on Packaging and Packaging Waste

The UNIDROIT/ICAO Draft Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment

Towards Equality and Diversity: Implementing the Employment and Race Directives

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (TUPE) reform

Treasury Shares

Under-Investment in University Research Infrastructure

Young Workers Directive

The Department is required to comply with the Consultation Code of Practice requiring a period of at least 12 weeks for responses to public consultations. Records relating to consultations the compliance with Criterion 5 of the consultation Code are currently being compiled. I will write to the hon. Member with the requested information as soon as possible and place a copy in the Libraries of the House. Information on the number of responses in each consultation exercise is not held centrally.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what public consultations have been commenced by her Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72065]

Ms Hewitt: The public consultations commenced by the Department since 1 April are as follows:

Commission proposal for a directive on the working conditions of temporary (agency) workers (closes 18 October 2002)

Developing Energy Policy—Key Issues for Consultation for the White Paper (closes 13 September 2002)

Employment status in relation to statutory employment rights. (closes 11 December 2002)

Flexible working (closes 10 October 2002)

Joint DTI/DCMS consultation on the Draft Communications Bill (closes 2 August 2002)

Maternity and parental leave, and paternity and adoption leave and pay: consultation on draft regulations (closes 19 July 2002)

Modernising Company Law (closes 30 November 2002)

The DTI Race Equality Scheme (closes 20 September 2002)

The preliminary decision to add new user groups to the approved users list in the Airwave mm02 Telecommunications Act licence (closes 5 June 2002)

The process for identifying the GB system operator (GBSO) (closes 12 July 2002)

Young Workers Directive (closes 6 September 2002)

All DTI consultation documents are published on the Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk

Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what statutory law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities there are within the responsibility of her Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57125]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* There are no statutory law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities within the responsibility of my Department; prosecutions are brought by the Department itself. The Department's basic procedure for dealing with complaints is that, if someone has a complaint, they should initially go back to their original contact in the Department; if the complainant is not satisfied with the response, they are invited to contact the official's line manager; if the problem still cannot be resolved, the matter is referred to the Head of the Management Unit for review. This procedure does not affect the complainant's right to approach, via an MP, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration or myself.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by her Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64623]

Ms Hewitt: 52 statutory instruments have been made by DTI since the beginning of 2002. These SIs revoked a total of 16 earlier SIs, and amended a total of 17 earlier SIs.

The cost and saving information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much and what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61026]

Ms Hewitt: Pay negotiations for 2002–03 have not yet been finalised. Therefore, planned pay costs as a proportion of total planned expenditure is not yet available.

The total resources of the Department for 2001–02 are shown in Table 1 of The Government's Expenditure Plans (Cm 5416), and the Department's admin expenditure is detailed in Table 5 of the same publication.

Departmental Policies (Wycombe)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the activities pursued by her Department that have had a particular impact on the Wycombe constituency since 7 June 2001. [58623]

Alan Johnson: The Department of Trade and Industry has funded a number of initiatives that have been delivered through the Small Business Service to help the economy in the Wycombe area. To date, a total of £518,856 of this funding has been spent since June 7 2001. This has included a Business Recovery fund (£9,000), a Diagnostic and Consultancy Scheme (£45,385), and International Trade Advice (£36,063).

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will answer the question of 17 June, 2002, from the hon. Member for Maidenhead, ref 464, on the Government's policy towards the independence of the economic regulators of privatised utilities. [71493]

Ms Hewitt: I have answered today.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether it is her policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via her Department's website. [72276]

Ms Hewitt: Departmental policy is that all documents published by DTI are available via the department's website. The policy on retention and archiving of elements of the website is currently under review.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for how long she retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website. [72286]

Ms Hewitt: Departmental policy is that all documents published by DTI are available via the department's website. The policy on retention and archiving of elements of the website is currently under review.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will answer the written question from the hon. Member for Chichester, tabled on 22 May, on the official travel of departmental and non-departmental special advisers. [72680]

Ms Hewitt: According to Part 1 of the Order Book for 22 May, there was not a question on this subject tabled to me from the hon. Member.

Regulation

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of *(a)* the Better Regulation Task Force and *(b)* the Ministerial Panel for Regulatory Accountability in strengthening the systems which control the regulatory burden. [70099]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: I have been asked to reply. The Government is committed to ensuring that regulations are fair and effective. The Better Regulation Task Force and the Panel on Regulatory Accountability, together with the Regulatory Impact Unit, are working together to achieve this goal. The Better Regulation Task Force has recently announced its new work programme. It will be reviewing:

alternatives to state regulation;

independent (non-economic) regulators;

the difficulties faced by small firms doing business with the public sector; and

regulatory issues associated with "producer responsibility" for the disposal of goods at the end of their lives.

To date, the Task Force has published 21 substantive reports, together making over 300 recommendations.

It is established practice under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information that information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committee business is not disclosed.

Credit Unions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what actions she has taken to promote the use of credit unions; and if she will make a statement. [70524]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

Credit unions have an important role to play in tackling financial exclusion and enhancing opportunity, through the provision of core financial services. That is why we have been involved in initiatives to help the movement grow. We are delivering a programme of strategic deregulation to enable credit unions to offer a greater range of services to their members.

Through the Financial Services and Markets Act we have brought credit unions under the regulatory supervision of the Financial Services Authority and given depositors with credit unions similar protection to those with banks or building societies. The new regulatory system, combined with our programme of deregulation, will give the movement a strong position from which to build and thrive.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will include nuclear energy generation in an emissions trading scheme. [71516]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

For target-holders, the UK Emissions Trading Scheme places the responsibility for emissions created by the generation of power with the end user of that power. This provides a strong incentive for energy users to increase their efficiency and to reduce emissions at the point of use. Therefore, if generators were also covered there would be a risk of double counting, where the generators could count emissions reductions made by down-stream users. Therefore, nuclear energy generation is not included in the UK Emissions Trading Scheme.

Nuclear Power

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress

the Government have made under the Ospar Convention to reduce nuclear discharges from Sellafield into the Irish Sea. [66106]

Margaret Beckett: I have been asked to reply.

The UK Strategy for Radioactive Discharges 2001–20 will be published very shortly. This will show how the UK will implement the OSPAR Radioactive Substances Strategy. The aim of that Strategy is to ensure progressive reduction of concentrations of radioactive substances in the marine environment so that by 2020 they are close to zero to historic levels.

Radioactive discharges from Sellafield have decreased dramatically over the past 25 years, to around 1 per cent. of their peak levels in the 1970s. The Strategy will show that further substantial reductions will be made in the period to 2020. The Environment Agency has carried out a full review of discharge authorisations at Sellafield and are expected to announce their draft decision soon. It will then be for me as Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for Health to decide whether we wish to exercise our statutory powers before any changes are put into effect. The Secretary of State for Health and I expect to announce shortly whether we wish to exercise our statutory powers in relation to the Agency's proposed decision on discharges of technetium-99 from Sellafield.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated clean up costs are for each *(a)* current and *(b)* past nuclear power station. [73119]

Mr. Wilson: The estimated cost of decommissioning depends on the strategy adopted by the operator and agreed with the relevant nuclear regulators. BNFL and British Energy publish annual accounts that include information on their respective nuclear provisions, including provisions for decommissioning and waste management, and the basis of their approach to decommissioning.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what limit is set on the financial liability of nuclear operators for damage arising from a nuclear accident; and if she will make a statement. [72989]

Mr. Wilson: With regard to liability of the UK nuclear industry in the event of a nuclear accident, the UK is a Contracting party to the Paris and Brussels Conventions on Third Party Liability in the Field of Nuclear Energy. One of the underlying principles of the Paris Convention is that all liability arising from a nuclear accident is channelled to the operator of the nuclear installation on a no fault basis. Present UK legislation requires operators to cover their liability by insurance, (the Nuclear Installations Act 1965) and operator's liability is currently limited to a maximum £140 million per accident.

Liability amounts are reviewed by the UK along with our international partners and the Paris and Brussels Conventions are currently in the process of revision with a view to substantially increase the operator's liability to £430 million per accident.

Nuclear Waste Disposal

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the timetable for deciding on the disposal of medium-level nuclear waste. [69456]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

We propose to press ahead with a review of waste management options. The review will seek the views of interested stakeholders, the public and government departments. We will appoint an independent body to oversee the review process which will make recommendations on the option, or combination of options, for managing radioactive waste which would achieve long-term protection for people and the environment. We will review all options—including surface storage and underground disposal—and revise the timetable to a four stage process rather than five as proposed in the original consultation.

The waste from our existing nuclear facilities will arise over the next century or so. So we intend, in assessing management options, to include not only materials currently classified as waste but also to consider the consequences of providing for other materials which may have to be managed as waste during the period, such as some separated plutonium, and uranium, as well as certain quantities of spent nuclear fuel.

We propose that the new body will be in place by the end of the year. Over the summer and autumn, we shall publish more detailed proposals. These will include details of the new body and its terms of reference. They will also address pressing issues such as arrangements for managing waste safely in the short-term and an announcement on waste substitution. We shall report progress on the other issues covered in the consultation, including decommissioning nuclear sites, the powers of the Environment Agencies, managing spent sealed sources of radioactivity, and waste classification.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's advocacy of a 60 per cent. carbon dioxide reduction by 2050. [71525]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Government will respond formally to all the recommendations in the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's twenty-second report—"Energy—the Changing Climate"—alongside publication of the Energy White Paper, which is due around the turn of the year.

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will formally reply to the RCEP's recent proposals. [71527]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Government will respond formally to all the recommendations in the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's twenty-second report—

"Energy—the Changing Climate"—alongside publication of the Energy White Paper, which is due around the turn of the year.

Johannesburg Summit

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to offset the carbon emissions *(a)* she personally and *(b)* the British Government delegation will account for in their attendance at the forthcoming earth summit in Johannesburg. [71774]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The carbon emissions caused by the government delegation's travel to and attendance at the World Summit on Sustainable Development have been offset through our participation in the Johannesburg Climate Legacy Project.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* investigations, *(b)* penalties and *(c)* prosecutions have been instituted since 31 December 2001 in respect of working families tax credit fraud. [67777]

Dawn Primarolo: During the period 1 January 2002 to 30 June 2002, 13,305 investigations have been opened by the issue of the Inland Revenue's Code of Practice on enquiries, 334 penalties determined and 25 prosecutions instituted in respect of Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Persons Tax Credit.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 25 June to the hon. Member for Havant, *Official Report,* column 763W, on Working Families Tax Credit, when the Inland Revenue completed its compliance benchmarking exercise; when it began to analyse it; when he expects to receive it; and what the administrative cost was of the benchmarking exercise. [67935]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue began analysing the results of compliance benchmarking exercise on Working Families' Tax Credit in February 2002 and that work is continuing. It is not possible to ascertain the specific costs of this exercise because the work was undertaken as part of routine compliance casework.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent of fraud in the child care element of working families tax credit; and how many *(a)* investigations and *(b)* prosecutions have been instituted into fraud in the childcare element of WFTC since 31 December 2001. [67773]

Dawn Primarolo: The childcare element is only one component of both Working Families' Tax Credit and Disabled Person's Tax Credits (WFTC and DPTC). During the period 1 January 2002 and 30 June 2002, 13,305 investigations of WFTC or DPTC awards were opened by the issue of the Inland Revenue's Code of Practice on enquiries, but it is not possible to say how many of these were in relation to childcare charges. During the period, one of the twenty-five prosecutions was instituted as a result of the falsification of childcare documentation.

Physical Activity

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the success of the Public Service Agreement with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to raise significantly the average time spent on sport and physical activity by those aged five to 16 years. [72466]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Richard Taylor) on 23 July, *Official Report*, column 975W.

WALES

Regulations (Cost-effectiveness)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Minister about the cost effectiveness of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (Electronic Communications) (Wales) Regulations. [60984]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Unfortunately, due to an administrative error, this question was missed. I can, though, now provide you with a full answer:

These are matters for the National Assembly for Wales. Section 65 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 provides for an appraisal of the costs and benefits of complying with Assembly general subordinate legislation to be carried out before a draft of the statutory instruments is laid before the Assembly.

Public Consultations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69799]

Mr. Paul Murphy: It was necessary to check through a number of files to obtain the relevant details and the final pieces of information did not arrive until after the deadline for responses on 24 July. I can, though, now provide a full answer to your question as follows:

Since its creation in July 1999 my Department has undertaken consultation on the following:

"Greater Protection and Better Management of Common Land in England and Wales". Copies were available online and in print. Consultation ran from 15 February to 26 July 2000.

"Amendments to the Government's Proposals for New Assisted Areas". Copies were available online and in print. Consultation ran from 10 April to 2 May 2000.

"Proposals to change the Administration of the Housing Transfer Programme". Copies were available online and in print. Consultation ran from 14 July to 31 August 2000.

"Government Proposal for the Reform of Business Tenancies" (jointly with Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions). Copies were available online and in print. Consultation ran from 19 March to 30 June 2001.

"Draft NHS (Wales) Bill". Copies were available online and in print. Consultation ran from 17 May to 5 July 2002.

"Draft Mental Health Bill" (jointly with Department of Health). Copies are available online and in print. Consultation is running currently from 25 June to 16 September 2002.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Crime Reduction Directors

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the amount allocated to each of the regional crime reduction directors. [71217]

Mr. John Denham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave the hon. Member for Castle Point (Robert Spink), on 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 863W.

Retail Crime

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will list for each Government office in the regions what proportion of the office's annual spend for 2001–02 was allocated to combating retail crime; [71224]

(2) if he will list for each statutory crime and disorder partnership the amount spent on retail crime partnerships in the financial year 2001–02. [71223]

Mr. John Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The attached table shows the amounts spent by regional crime reduction directors specifically on retail crime reduction initiatives in 2001–02 and shows these as a proportion of their total spending on crime reduction initiatives. These figures do not include funding spent on non-specific schemes, such as town centre Close Circuit Television (CCTV), which may also benefit retailers in the areas where they operate.

The Home Office does not record the amounts spent on retail crime partnerships in each of the 376 statutory crime and disorder partnerships.

Column 1 Region	*Column 2 Spend on retail crime projects in 2001–02 (£)*	*Column 3 Column 2 as a proportion of annual spending of regional crime reduction directors in 2001–02 (per cent.)*
Eastern	132,262	1.0
East Midlands	221,064	1.4
London	336,225	1.1
North East	248,668	2.2
North West	561,864	2.3
South East	251,500	1.4
South West	94,549	0.7
Wales	132,262	1.6
West Midlands	469,199	2.6
Yorkshire and Humber	325,128	1.7

Accommodation (Review)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library his Department's last accommodation requirements review. [70769]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is assessing its future accommodation requirements in the light of the Machinery of Government changes in June 2002 and will be reviewing the position in the Autumn. No documents are currently available.

Empty Properties

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many dwellings he estimates are empty in each local authority area in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* Suffolk. [71471]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The information presented in the table below is taken from the 2001 Housing Investment Programme Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix.

	LA	*RSL*	*Other Public Sector*	*Private Sector*	*Of which owner occupied*
Essex					
Tendering	57	7	8	740	#
Colchester	114	25	368	2255	#
Malden	0	18	0	1250	1250
Rochford	33	4	0	724	617
Southend	180	33	[illegible]	1680	#
Castle Point	18	0	0	1280	#
Basildon	183	33	4	1313	1256
Thurrock	186	3	0	1788	#
Brentwood	52	8	6	657	#
Epping	148	25	0	1739	#
Harlow	159	20	2	429	407
Uttlesford	30	0	0	#	#
Braintree	46	#	148	1968	#
Chelmsford	46	#	7	1486	#
Suffolk					
Forest Heath	13	0	#	585	#
St Edmunds	33	0	0	1010	788
Mid Suffolk	32	5	0	1437	1353
Babergh	29	3	0	626	#
Ipswich	51	77	10	1686	1349
Suffolk Coastal	5	47	0	2282	1803
Waveney	147	13	6	1230	#

= no figure returned

Local Authority dwellings are those which the authority owns within the authority area

Registered Social Landlord dwellings are those owned or leased by landlords registered with the Housing Corporation.

Other public sector dwellings cover those owned by the authority for non-housing purposes and by other authorities inside the LA area. Housing Action Trusts, government departments and other public sector agencies (e.g. Regional Health Authorities, Forestry Commission and county councils).

Other private sector is defined as all privately owned dwellings

The total number of vacant dwellings in a district can be estimated using council tax records, or a local survey if available, and have the same coverage of dwellings except that second homes, holiday lets, dwellings in unlicensed accommodation, and flats and houses normally occupied by students should not be included. Vacants include dwellings that are empty between changing occupants or undergoing modernisation, repair or conversion, or awaiting demolition; or newly completed but not occupied.

These figures relate to those returned by local authorities in July 2002 as part of the annual Housing Investment Programme returns. This years round is now underway and local authorities are due to submit figures to OPDM by 31 July 2002.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what evaluation has been made of the potential of modular assembly in the construction of affordable housing; and if he will make a statement. [73542]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Modular housing has the potential to offer significant time savings and potential cost reduction in provision of affordable housing particularly in high density, urban housing schemes as illustrated by the Peabody Trust development at Murray Grove, Hackney. It is still a developing area and we will be taking a close interest in what it can offer as part of a solution to housing need.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much funding has been granted to the Housing Corporation in each of the years 1990 to 2001. [71298]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The expenditure by the Housing Corporation for each of the following years 1990–91 to 2001–02 is shown below. The figures include capital and revenue grants to housing associations, and the Corporation's administrative expenditure.

	£m
1990–91	920.0
1991–92	1,870.7
1992–93	2,670.6
1993–94	2,326.9
1994–95	2,098.9
1995–96	1,753.4
1996–97	1,638.1
1997–98	1,327.8
1998–99	1,245.8
1999–2000	1,329.9
2000–01	1,404.9
2001–02	1,421.5

Source:
Housing Corporation Annual Accounts (Income and Expenditure Account).

The Housing Corporation accounts for 2001–02 are due to be published shortly. A copy will be placed in the House library.

Home Extensions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what statutory restrictions there are on people who want to build extensions to their home. [72857]

Mr. Tony McNulty: A range of statutory consents may be required depending on the particular circumstances. These may include: planning permission, listed building consent, conservation area consent and building regulations approval. Other consents may also be required. For example, if the proposed development would obstruct a public path, it may require an order to divert or close it.

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 sets out categories of permitted development, where an application for planning permission would not be required. This includes the building of a house extension in certain defined circumstances. The Department's booklet "Planning, A Guide for Householders" provides advice to home owners on the need for planning permission. (This is available on our website at www.planning.odpm.gov.uk/householders/index.htm) Home owners are advised to consult their local authority before beginning any works.

Planning Application (Seller Properties)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he received the planning application submitted to the London Borough of Southwark on behalf of Sellar Properties by Healey and Baker, registered as LBS application reference 0100476 and granted planning permission by LBS on 11 March, subject to call in by the Secretary of State; when he expects to make a decision on whether to call in the application for public inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [72999]

Mr. Tony McNulty: This application was referred to the Secretary of State following approval by LB Southwark and was received on 19 March. The Secretary of State called this application in for public inquiry earlier today.

Out-of-Town Shopping Centres

Keith Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many appeals have been made concerning applications for out-of-town shopping centres; and how many have been successful since 7 June. [73244]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The information requested on the location of appeals made and decided is not readily available and could only be made so at disproportionate cost.

Urban Allotment Land

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action is being taken to protect urban allotment land from development; and if he will make a statement. [73544]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Section 8 of the *Allotments Act 1925* requires local authorities to obtain the Secretary of State's consent for the disposal of any statutory allotment site. In February this year, guidance was issued to local authorities clarifying and strengthening the criteria against which consent decisions are made.

In addition, we have recently published a revision of Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation,* which provides enhanced protection through the planning system to all typed of open space, including allotments.

Local Government Expenditure

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the per capita central Government funding is for local government expenditure on *(a)* Surrey and *(b)* Durham. [72393]

Mr. Nick Raynsford: Local authorities, including police authorities, within Durham and Surrey budgeted to receive £920 and £630 government grant per head in 2002–03, respectively. Government grant here consists of revenue support grant, non-domestic rates, specific grants inside aggregate external finance and police grant. These figures do not include capital grants or grants paid to the Housing Revenue Account.

Budgeted revenue expenditure, financed from the grants referred to above, council taxes and reserves, was £1,246 per head in Durham and £1,052 per head in Surrey. For each area, almost all of the locally raised expenditure was budgeted to come from council taxes: £315 per head in Durham and £413 per head in Surrey.

The figures quoted above for Durham include grants receivable in Darlington, which is now a unitary authority. This is because Durham Police Authority covers the areas of both Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council, and a separate figure is not available for the grant receivable by Durham Police Authority for the area of Durham County Council.

Homelessness (Castle Point)

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will intervene in respect of Castle Point Borough Council to ensure that the local homelessness problem is tackled. [73307]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The Homelessness Directorate within my Department has recently been set up to ensure that homelessness is tackled effectively and officials will be working closely with local authorities to assist them in the development of their homelessness strategies over the coming year.

Latest figures for the first quarter of 2002–03 indicate that on average 0.1 households per 1,000 in Castle Point are accepted as being in priority need for accommodation. The area currently has around 20 families with children in B and B accommodation.

Officials from the Homelessness Directorate have discussed with the authority how this number can be reduced and have encouraged Castle Point to put in a bid for a share of the £10 million available to local authorities to support their homelessness strategy. These resources will be additional to Castle Point's share of the £8 million the Government has already allocated through Revenue Support Grant to implement the Homelessness Act. Castle Point will also receive a share of £10 million which is about to be allocated to local authorities to assist in the implementation of the Priority Need Order. The Directorate will be monitoring the Authority's progress closely.

High Hedges

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what powers are available to local authorities to mediate in disputes involving the problems of high hedges and rapidly growing trees; and if he will make a statement. [73015]

Mr. Nick Raynsford: Local authorities currently have no specific powers to intervene in disputes involving the problems of high hedges and rapidly growing trees. The Government is, however, committed to bringing forward new laws, which would allow local authorities to deal with complaints about high hedges, as soon as Parliamentary time can be found.

Job Locations

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72734]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: I would refer the right hon. Lady to the table below which shows the position within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister at 1 June 2002:

Office of Deputy Prime Minister	*Full Time Equivalent*	*Location*
Core Department[1]	1,856	London, South East, Midlands and the NW
Government Offices	2,360	English Regions which consists of:
		East of England—Cambridge
		East Midlands—Nottingham
		London
		North East—Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Office of Deputy Prime Minister	Full Time Equivalent	Location
		North West—Liverpool and Manchester South East—Guildford South West—Bristol, Plymouth and Truro West Midlands—Birmingham Yorkshire and The Humber—Leeds
Executive Agencies[2]	1,744 which consists of:-	
Fire Service College.	180	Gloucestershire
The Planning Inspectorate.	667	Bristol and Cardiff
Queen Elizabeth 2 Conference Centre.	55	London
The Rent Service.	842	Throughout England
Grand Total	5,960	

[1] The core department for the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) employs approximately 1,856 staff. This figure is composed of staff working on policy areas and includes an estimate of 50 per cent. of the support staff who worked for the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). This figure may change when re-structuring is complete and final decisions have been taken on how support staff are to be allocated to the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and Department for Transport (DfT).
[2] The figures for the Executive Agencies are estimates—based on their plans for year 2002–03 and are taken from the DTLR (C) Departmental Annual Report 2002.

I will write to the hon. Member with details for non-departmental public bodies and independent statutory bodies in due course.

It has not been possible to calculate the percentage per individual department, body or organisation as we do not have a breakdown of the total figures by region.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what public consultations have been commenced by his Department since 1 April; and what the *(a)* closing date and *(b)* website address of each were. [72069]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: A list of the public consultations by the Office or its predecessors since 1 April 2002 has been placed in the Library, including the closing dates for responses and the website address of each document. The list is based on central records and reflects the public consultations undertaken within the areas for which the Office is currently responsible.

Information Campaigns

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1362W, if he will list the campaigns managed by the Central Office of Information in each of the last five financial years; and what the *(a)* costs and *(b)* advertising agencies that received contracts for each campaign were. [72419]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Tables listing the advertising campaigns managed by the Central Office of Information in each of the last five financial years with their costs and the advertising agencies contracted have today been placed in the libraries of the House.

Air-Conditioning

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what actions his Department has taken to communicate to *(a)* the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers and *(b)* the Building Services Journal the Government's policy on the use of HFC refrigerants in air-conditioning. [71357]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Government issued the UK Climate Change Programme in November 2000 and its publication was widely publicised. The Programme sets out the key elements of the Government's policy on HFCs to enable industry and users to make investment decisions with more certainty.

My officials are now writing to the Building Services Engineers and the Building Services Journal enclosing details of the policy on HFC use in air-conditioning systems.

Formaldehyde Emissions

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has to change the regulations on industrial formaldehyde emissions in the light of HSE advice on the levels of concentration at which strong odours occur. [68354]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Risks to worker health from formaldehyde are already addressed by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999 (COSHH). The Health and Safety Commission has approved Maximum Exposure Limits (MELs) for formaldehyde at 2 ppm (parts per million by volume) as an 8-hour time-weighted average, and 2 ppm as a short-term limit with a 15-minute reference period. Under COSHH, exposure by inhalation to a substance with a maximum exposure limit must be reduced as far as is reasonably practicable, and in any case below the MEL.

In its documentation summarising the criteria for setting MELs, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) states that formaldehyde has a threshold of detection by smell at around 0.8 ppm. An earlier HSE Toxicity Review notes that the threshold for odour detection varies among individuals, with values in the range 0.05–1 ppm having been reported; it is expected that all would detect the odour at the latter value. HSE has issued no further advice relating odour to concentration; it does not normally seek to offer advice on odour problems.

Industrial formaldehyde emissions to the wider environment are currently regulated by local authorities or, where larger industrial processes are concerned, by the Environment Agency, under the provisions of the

Environment Protection Act 1990. Each industrial process requires an authorisation from the regulator. Where formaldehyde emissions are likely to cause environmental harm, each authorisation will contain conditions designed to limit its release. The regulator may at any time vary those conditions if it considers that necessary.

The regulatory system established by the 1990 Act is gradually being replaced—from now to mid-2007—by that set out in the Pollution Prevention and Control (England and Wales) Regulations 2000. Each industrial installation will require a permit, which must contain conditions relating to formaldehyde emissions if these are likely to be significant to human health or human senses, or to impair or interfere with amenities and other legitimate uses of the environment.

CABINET OFFICE

Arms Exports

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the oral statement of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths) of 24 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 635, of criterion 8 of the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing criteria; whether the review is devising a series of tests to determine whether an arms export may compromise the sustainable development of a developing country; when he expects the review to be completed; and how the Government intends to inform Parliament of the outcome of the review. [64963]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the detailed reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 31 July.

Women (Consultation)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which women's organisations have been consulted over proposed legislation by his Department during 2000–01 and 2001–02 sessions; and if their responses have been published. [61081]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Cabinet Office consulted on the proposed Regulatory Reform Bill in March and September 1999. The Women's National Commission was consulted, but did not respond. The Regulatory Reform Act received Royal Assent on 10 April 2001.

Communications Bill

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which Government Department will have lead responsibility for the Communications Bill when it is introduced for Second Reading. [68044]

Stephen Timms: I have been asked to reply The Communications Bill has been prepared jointly by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Should the Bill be given a place in the legislative programme for the next session, both Departments will continue to take it forward jointly.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70489]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The costs which can be identified are shown in the table. Some costs are met by the publisher and do not fall to Government.

Year	*Cost*
1998	£1,696
1999	£6,251
2000	£2,699
2001	£25,248*
2002	£23,177

* Included Main Estimates for 2001–02, an increased number of tables and an improved presentational format.

The Cabinet Office's departmental report also incorporated the departmental report requirement and submissions for the Central Office of Information; the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England; the Privy Council Office; House of Lords; House of Commons; National Audit Office and the Electoral Commission.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website; [72291]

(2) for how long he retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website. [72283]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Cabinet Office does not have a set time limit for documents to be retained on its website.

Minimum requirements for the type of documents which should be published on Government websites are set out in guidance issued by the Office of the e-Envoy, "Guidelines for UK Government Websites" (Illustrated Handbook for web management teams—section 2.2 "What content should be on your website?" and section 2.3 "Cross-government requirements").

In addition to setting out guidelines on documents for inclusion, the Guidance also explicitly requires Departments to ensure that the content of the site as a whole is up to date and current and, where it is necessary, to update the content of individual documents to show the latest date of amendment clearly on the document concerned.

Section 1.2.7 deals with the issue of Records management and the Office of the e-Envoy currently has a consultation paper out on archiving websites. The purpose of this draft annex to the Illustrated handbook is to provide government website managers with a framework towards developing within their website management policy suitable procedures and systems to assist in the management, appraisal and preservation of electronic records. A copy of this draft is available online at http://ww.e-envoy.gov.uk/webguidelines.htm

The Cabinet Office is in the process of updating its website to conform to these Guidelines.

Education Reform

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress his office has made in helping delivering reform of education services since the Comprehensive Spending Review. [72090]

Estelle Morris: I have been asked to reply. Since the Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 the Government has put in place a number of reforms to raise standards of attainment, improve the quality of education and skills provision and invest in the workforce and physical infrastructure to deliver these reforms. The Department has met several of its targets and is making good progress towards almost all of the others. Further information can be found in the department's annual report on www.dfes.gov.uk/deptreport2002

Anglo-Irish Ministerial Meetings

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office on what dates ministers in his Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government departments were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [72689]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: There have been no bilateral meetings between Cabinet Office Ministers and Irish Government Ministers and officials since 1 June 2000.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58731]

Jane Kennedy: The information you have requested is not held centrally and could therefore only be provided at disproportionate cost.

North Belfast

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the community background is in percentage terms of those juveniles prosecuted since 1 July 2001 arising out of disturbances in North Belfast. [62636]

Jane Kennedy: Although the existing database is currently being upgraded and the information on prosecutions since July 2001 will not be available until late summer 2002, it will not enable identification of the offender's community background.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what decisions have been made by his Department in the last year under authority from the Royal Prerogative. [63134]

Jane Kennedy: Records are not kept of individual occassions on which powers under the Royal Prerogative are exercised, nor would it practicable to do so.

EU Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the EU directives and regulations that have been implemented through his Department in 2002; and what was the cost of each to public funds. [64996]

Jane Kennedy: There have been no EU directives and regulations implemented through the Northern Ireland Office in 2002.

Buildings Insurance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost of buildings insurance to his Department was *(a)* before and *(b)* after 11 September 2001. [66929]

Jane Kennedy: Departments are required to comply with the Government's general policy on insurance, which is set out in Government Accounting, Chapter 30, para. 30.2.5, which notes that government does not need to purchase insurance to protect the viability of its business, and should consider insurance only were the value of claims met would exceed the cost of insurance premiums. Commercial insurance of a building is acceptable in cases where (a) insurance is a condition of a lease (b) the lessor will not except a Government indemnity (c) incurring the total cost of the accommodation in question, including the cost of the insurance, is more cost-effective than other accommodation options [Government Accounting, para. 30.2.11a].

The NIO occupies approximately 40 different properties, which are a mixture of commercially and publicly owned. In terms of building insurance, only a handful of premises pay for their own insurance costs directly (at a total value of less than £10,000). The rest either pay for insurance as part of a quarterly service charge (or it is inclusive with their rental) or claim indemnity as described above.

Of these buildings which pay their own insurance, premiums have increased over the last year, however it is not possible to say how much of this years increase is directly related to September 11.

Public Consultations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 8 June 2001, indicating the *(a)* length and *(b)* number of responses received in each case. [68705]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is as follows:

Consultation	*Length*	*Responses*
Northern Ireland Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme 2002	5 months	15
Creating a Safer Northern Ireland through Partnership	3 months	31
Consultation Paper on the Review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997	3 months	22
Consultation of Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) (Amendment) (No2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001	6 weeks	12
Trainee Regulation	3 weeks	6
Flags and Emblems Regulation	3.5 weeks	41
Planning Regulation	6 weeks	3
Code of Practice on the appointment of Independent members to District Policing Partnerships	14 months	20

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much is set aside for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for 2002–03. [67335]

Desmond Browne: A budget of £1.2 million has been made available for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for the financial year 2002–03.

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69800]

Jane Kennedy: The Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation applies to all formal national public consultation documents issued by Departments from 1 January 2001 and the information requested is not available before that date. Since 2001, the details are as follows:

Consultation	*Available online*	*Available In print*	*Date opened*	*Date closed*
Review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997	Yes	Yes	16.07.01	19.10.01
Police (Recruitment) (NI) Regulations 2001	No	Yes	28.02.01	21.03.01
Police Trainee Regulations (NI) 2001	No	Yes	04.09.01	21.09.01
Police Emblems and Flags Regulations (NI) 2002	Yes	Yes	19.11.01	12.12.01
The Police (NI Act) 2000 (Policing Plan) Regulations 2002	No	Yes	21.12.01	01.02.02
Code of Practice on the appointment of independent members to District Policing Partnerships	No	Yes	13.03.02	22.05.02
Police Service of NI (Recruitment of Police Support Staff) Regulations (NI) 2002	No	Yes	13.03.02	08.04.02
Criminal Injuries Compensation (NI) Order 2002	Yes	Yes	28.06.01	30.11.01
Review of the Juvenile Justice Centre Estate	Yes	Yes	31.03.00	30.06.00
Creating a Safer Northern Ireland Through Partnership	Yes	Yes	11.04.02	03.07.02
The Rehabilitation of Offenders (Exceptions) (Amendment) (No 2) Order (NI) 2001	Yes	Yes	24.09.01	26.10.01
Proceeds of Crime Bill Consultation on Draft Legislation	Yes	Yes	05.03.01	29.05.01
Criminal Justice Review (plus 18 research volumes)	Yes	Yes	30.03.00	29.09.00
Review of the Criminal Justice system in Northern Ireland	Yes	Yes	12.11.01	07.01.02
Draft Justice (NI) Bill/Implementation Plan				

Parades Commission

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the annual cost of the Parades Commission in Northern Ireland since its inception; and how much in allowances has been paid to those currently on the Commission. [69938]

Jane Kennedy: The annual cost of the Parades Commission since it's inception in March 1997 was:

1997–98	*£613,564**
1998–99	£1,066,220
1999–2000	£1,023,559
2000–01	£1,105,677
2001–02	£1,119,807
Total:	£4,928,827

In relation to allowances, those on the Commission are entitled to mileage and subsistence allowances. It is not possible to identify these allowances from the total cost of travel.

Departmental Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* full-time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70542]

Jane Kennedy: (a) The number of staff employed in the Information Service in the last five years is as follows:

April 1998	*40*
April 1999	52
April 2000	52
April 2001	36
April 2002	37

(b) There have not been any secondees placed in the Information Service in the last five years.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Tax Credit

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost to the Exchequer will be of

the pension tax credit when implemented for *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05, *(c)* 2005–06 and *(d)* 2006–07. [71577]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) on 24 July 2002. *Official Report*, column 1542W.

Benefits (London)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost of *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit in (i) the London Borough of Enfield and (ii) Greater London was in each of the last 10 years. [73538]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit expenditure in the London Borough of Enfield and Greater London (£ millions)

	London Borough of Enfield		*Greater London*	
	Housing Benefit	*Council Tax Benefit*	*Housing Benefit*	*Council Tax Benefit*
1991–92	38	7	1,465	187
1992–93	47	8	1,826	220
1993–94	53	11	2,248	301
1994–95	64	12	2,441	330
1995–96	72	12	2,644	373
1996–97	78	13	2,735	398
1997–98	74	13	2,611	399
1998–99	75	13	2,524	383
1999–2000	77	14	2,534	380
2000–01	81	15	2,546	389

Source:
annual subsidy returns by local authorities to the Department for Work and Pensions and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £1 million.
2. The figures for 2000–01 are provisional. All other figures are actual annual expenditure but are subject to change as local authority activity is fully audited.
3. Figures are consistent with those published in the Chancellor's Budget Report, April 2002.
4. Greater London consists of the 32 London boroughs and the Corporation of the City of London.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Crown Prosecution Service

Ms Drown: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to allow the Crown Prosecution Service to attend hearings of appeals against sentences to represent the victim's interests. [73414]

The Solicitor General: Sir Robin Auld in his Review of the Criminal Courts (October 2001) recommended in relation to the work of the Court of Appeal that:

"The Crown Prosecution Service should consider on a case by case basis whether to appear on the hearing of an appeal against sentence so as to be able to assist the Court, if required, on matters of fact, including the effect on any victim, or of law" (Recommendation 321)

The Government has accepted that recommendation which will be taken forward by the Lord Chief Justice building on existing arrangements that enable the CPS to be represented at some sentencing appeals in the Court of Appeal. The role of the CPS at such hearings is to represent the state. In doing so it can take account of the interests of individual victims.

Pensions Appeal Tribunal

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Pensions Appeal Tribunal finds that a pension payable to a retired disabled officer was granted on account of medical unfitness attributable to military service from when payments of that pension are payable. [72850]

Dr. Lewis Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

When the Pensions Appeal Tribunal (PAT) decides that disablement is attributable to, or aggravated by, service the Secretary of State for Defence assesses the degree of disablement and decides from which date any payment of pension should be paid in accordance with Schedule 3 to the Naval, Military and Air Forces Etc (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983. There is a right of appeal against the decision on the level of assessment of disablement and since 9 April 2001 a right of appeal against the decision on the commencement date of the pension.

If an appeal is successful the pension will normally be paid from the date of the claim or date of the application for review, whichever led to the appeal.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72261]

Ms Yvette Cooper: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1373W.

Criminal Courts Review

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the Central Council of Magistrates' response to the Criminal Courts Review. [73049]

Ms Yvette Cooper: The Central Council of Magistrates' Courts Committees submitted a written response to Sir Robin Auld's Report, which is available on our website. Their views were considered along with the nearly 500 other responses received, many from individual magistrates and Magistrates' Courts Committees. This consideration helped form the Government's conclusions which were set out in the Criminal Justice White Paper "Justice for All", which was published on 17 July 2002.

CAFCASS

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money is owed within the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service; and *(a)* by and *(b)* to whom it is owed. [73224]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service's (CAFCASS) Accounts for 2001–02, show £4.3 million as being owed to creditors on 31 March 2002. The three largest amounts owed were to CAFCASS Guardians at £1,211,900, £1,706,700 for accommodation and £248,400 for staff related expenses. During 2001–02, CAFCASS paid 88 per cent. of all invoices within a 30-day period, during 2002–03 this has risen to well above 90 per cent.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70547]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* (a) The number of full-time officers working in the Foreign and Commonwealth Press Office (News Department) over the last 5 years was:

1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
23	23	20 (3 slots vacant)	19 (4 slots vacant)	29

(b) No records are kept of the number of short term secondees for the last five years.

Baroness Amos

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings the Baroness Amos has had with hon. Members since 7 June 2001. [71592]

Mr. Straw: My noble Friend the Baroness Amos has had 59 meetings with hon. Members since 7 June 2001. This figure includes meetings with Ministers from other Government Departments, but does not include meetings with Peers or FCO Ministers.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visits abroad the Baroness Amos has made since 7 June 2001. [71593]

Mr. Straw: My noble Friend the Baroness Amos has made 28 overseas visits since 7 June 2001.

Overseas Territories

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answers of 1 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1639W, on overseas territories if he will make a further statement on *(a)* the Order in Council and *(b)* local legislation in (i) Bermuda, (ii) Gibraltar and (iii) the Cayman Islands. [72652]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Anti-terrorism (Financial and other Measures) (Overseas Territories) Order 2002 was laid before Parliament on 26 July and came into force on 1 August. The text of the Order has been sent to the Territories to which it extends (Anguilla, Falkland Islands, Montserrat, St Helena and Dependencies, Turks and Caicos Islands and the British Virgin Islands) and has been posted on the Stationery Office website. Copies have been sent also to Bermuda, Gibraltar and the Cayman Islands where the text will be used as a model for their own domestic legislation. Legislation is unlikely to be introduced in Bermuda before the House of Assembly rises for the summer. In Gibraltar drafting of local legislation is underway. Draft legislation for the Cayman Islands is being finalised.

Nice Treaty

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what rules will apply to the Ambassador and staff of the British Embassy in Dublin during the forthcoming Irish referendum on the Nice Treaty; what guidelines will be issued on intervention in Irish public and political affairs *(a)* in the run up to and *(b)* during the referendum; and if he will make a statement. [72990]

Peter Hain: In accordance with normal practice, and Article 41 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961, the Ambassador and staff of the British Embassy in Dublin will make no intervention in Irish public and political affairs in connection with the forthcoming referendum on the Nice Treaty.

British Council

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide support to the British Council to enable it to undertake its proposals to develop further its Connecting Futures programme. [73197]

Mr. Macshane: In his statement to the House on 15 July my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced increases of £5 million, £10 million and £20 million in the grant-in-aid for the British Council over the next three years; an average annual increase of 3.0 per cent. in real terms. This increase, on top of the 3.3 per cent. average annual increases after inflation in the 2000 Spending Review, will have increased the total grant funded activities of the British Council by nearly £50 million since 2000–01.

The additional funding will enable the Council to press ahead with a number of important initiatives, including its Connecting Futures Programme.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide assistance to enable the British Council to open new regional centres in *(a)* Kaliningrad, *(b)* Banya Luka and *(c)* Sarajevo. [73194]

Mr. Macshane: The British Council has had an office in Sarajevo since 1994. In its recent Spending Review bid the British Council set out various proposals for increasing its activities, including opening regional centres in Kaliningrad and Banja Luka.

In his statement to the House on 15 July my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced increases of £5 million, £10 million and £20 million in the grant-in-aid for the British Council over the next three years, an average annual increase of 3.0 per cent. in real terms. This increase, on top of the 3.3 per cent. average annual increases after inflation in the 2000 Spending Review, will have increased the total grant funded activities of the British Council by nearly £50 million since 2000–01.

The additional funding will enable the Council to press ahead with a number of important initiatives. Decisions about the opening of new offices are expected in the autumn.

Cyprus

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) of 16 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 178W, on Cyprus, if he will set out the framework of relevant Security Council resolutions and treaties to be considered in the comprehensive peace negotiation between the two communities in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [73021]

Peter Hain: UN Security Council Resolution 1250 (1999) sets the framework for the current talks for a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus. It calls upon the two leaders to commit themselves to the following principles:

— no preconditions;

— all issues on the table;

— commitment in good faith to continue to negotiate until a settlement is reached;

— full consideration of relevant United Nations resolutions and treaties.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what factors will be taken into account by the *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU in deciding whether Cyprus will accede to membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [73681]

Peter Hain: In order to accede to the EU, each candidate country must comply with the EU's accession criteria as set out by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993. In respect of the accession of Cyprus, the UK and EU position remains as set out in the Conclusions reached by the 1999 Helsinki European Council, which stated that:

"A political settlement will facilitate the accession of Cyprus to the European Union. If no settlement has been reached by the completion of accession negotiations, the Council's decision on accession will be made without the above being a precondition. In this the Council will take account of all relevant factors."

Crime Against International Law

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the German Government, *(b)* representatives of the German Government in London and *(c)* his own representatives in Berlin, concerning the German Act to introduce the Code of Crimes Against International Law of 26 June; what advice he has received on its implications for citizens of the UK; and if he will make a statement. [73193]

Peter Hain: This legislation is designed to bring Germany's domestic criminal law into line with its commitments under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Although Germany ratified the Rome Statute on 11 December 2000 it has not until now completed its legislation to implement the Statute. The United Kingdom adopted its own legislation (the ICC Act and ICC Scotland 2001) before ratifying the Statute. The German government has kept British Embassy officials in Berlin informed of its legislative progress. I do not envisage any special problems for British citizens arising from this legislation.

Baku-Ceyhan Pipeline

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications he has received in the last 10 months concerning the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline; and if he will make a statement. [73165]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is in regular contact with the Government of Azerbaijan and the commercial companies involved in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project. We fully support this project, in which BP is taking a leading role.

Two high level visits have been made to Baku this year. The Minister for Energy, my hon. friend the Member for Cunninghame North (Mr. Brian Wilson), attended the Caspian Oil and Gas Show in Azerbaijan in June. In the same month, the Lord Mayor of London led a delegation from the financial services sector to Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Both discussed oil and gas issues, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

Spain/Gibraltar

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government have taken in the European Court to address border queues between Spain and Gibraltar. [72861]

Peter Hain: None. The Commission announced the conclusion of their investigation into the situation at the border on 19 March. A copy of their statement has been placed in the libraries of the House. The Spanish government also confirmed on 19 March that in response to requests made by the UK during the Brussels Process talks a new second channel would be opened. This became operational on 21 March. We continue to believe that dialogue is the best way of overcoming our differences with Spain over Gibraltar.

Terrorism

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with European colleagues over intensifying co-operation to neutralise funding for terrorist purposes. [73209]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In addition to obligations under UNSCR 1390 to freeze the assets of Al Qa'ida and its associates, EC Regulation 2580/02 obliges member states to freeze the assets of other agreed terrorist groups and individuals. We and EU partners have regular discussions on implementation of this regulation. The Bank of England website (www.bankofengland.co.uk) maintains a full list of all those whose assets are currently frozen in the UK.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in increasing co-operation between member states of the EU in the war on terrorism since 11 September 2001. [73212]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There has been good progress in implementing the counter-terrorism measures agreed by EU Heads of Government and Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in September 2001. In particular, the Council of Ministers has adopted the framework decisions on a European arrest warrant; on terrorism; and on joint investigative teams. Practical and effective co-operation between Europe's intelligence and law-enforcement agencies to combat terrorism has also continued to improve. The Seville European Council in June committed the EU to continue to maintain the closest possible coordination with the United States and other partners in the fight against terrorism, and to contribute further to international efforts against terrorism. Through its political dialogue with third countries, the EU is encouraging others to take the necessary legislative and operational actions to combat terrorism. Where appropriate, the EU is seeking to deliver assistance in counter-terrorist disciplines, through existing programmes.

Anglo-Scottish Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72720]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Ministers from my Department have frequent meetings with Ministers from the Scottish Executive, both formal and informal, covering a broad range of topics.

India

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest assessment is of the situation regarding cross-border terrorist incursions into India. [73057]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As my right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary, made clear during his visit to India and Pakistan on 19–20 July, we all want to see a permanent end to infiltration across the Line of Control. The recent reduction in the level of infiltration, and de-escalatory steps taken by both sides, are welcome developments. We will continue to work with international partners to encourage India and Pakistan to maintain the de-escalatory momentum and return to productive dialogue on all outstanding issues between them, including Kashmir.

Immigration Officers

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many immigration officers and support staff work in the Consulate in New Delhi, Mumbai, Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore when the operations are fully operational. [73052]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The authorised establishments in New Delhi, Mumbai, Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore prior to June were:

Karachi—8 Entry Clearance Officers and 32 support staff.

Islamabad—32 Entry Clearance Officers and 100 support staff.

New Delhi—14 Entry Clearance Officers and 40 support staff.

Mumbai—11 Entry Clearance Officers and 25 support staff.

Lahore—6 Entry Clearance Officers and 26 support staff.

East Timor

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Indonesian Government on the death in East Timor in 1999 of Sander Thoenes and on the deaths in East Timor in 1975 of British citizens Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters, and other newsmen; and if he will make a statement. [73545]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are in close touch with the Dutch Government who have led on the case of the Dutch citizen Sander Thoenes. On 17 July, Indonesian prosecutors said they would seek to reopen the investigation into this case after receiving new evidence from the Dutch authorities. We have raised the Balibo case with the Indonesian authorities at every appropriate opportunity and will continue to do so.

Israel

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Israel's holding of the relatives of suspected militants. [73305]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We believe that Israel is currently detaining twenty-one relatives of suspected terrorists. If Israel suspects that these people have committed offences, they should be brought to justice. In the absence of such evidence, they should be released. Collective punishments

and deportation of protected persons are prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention. We strongly urge Israel to refrain from such action.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence his Department has collated on political influence in prosecution decisions in Sierra Leone. [72178]

Mr. Macshane: We have collated no specific evidence on the influence of politics in prosecution decisions. But we are aware of the parlous state of the judiciary in Sierra Leone, which has been allowed to deteriorate over the past twenty years or more. We also recognise that the confidence of ordinary Sierra Leoneans in the proper functioning of the judiciary is at a low ebb. We are especially concerned about delays in moving forward a large number of outstanding corruption cases, and have made clear our desire that they be brought to an early conclusion.

A properly functioning judicial process is an essential element of good governance. We are therefore helping the government of Sierra Leone with judicial reform. Part of our engagement in Sierra Leone has concentrated on law reform, including the refurbishment of court buildings in both Freetown and the provinces that were damaged or destroyed during the civil war.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with Sierra Leone's President on *(a)* broadening his Government, *(b)* defusing ethnic tensions in Sierra Leone and *(c)* speeding up reforms of the security structures in Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [72179]

Mr. Macshane: We maintain a regular dialogue with President Kabbah and senior members of his government on a wide range of international issues and matters relating to our bilateral engagement in the country. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and my noble Friend Baroness Amos met with President Kabbah on 17 June. A major part of our bilateral relationship involves reform of the security sector. Since May 2000, we have made, and continue to make, considerable progress in the development of a new army under democratic control, and restructuring the police. But there is still much work to be done.

The end of the conflict in Sierra Leone, brought about by the sustained engagement of the United Nations, the UK and regional leaders, has opened up a new and promising chapter in Sierra Leone's road to democracy. It is the prerogative of the President to nominate members of his government. We believe that politicians both in government and in opposition, and from all ethnic backgrounds, have a vital role to play in helping to consolidate the peace and move the country forward, and we have made clear our strong commitment to helping Sierra Leone in its post conflict recovery.

Bermuda

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's policy is with regard to the use of opinion polls conducted in Bermuda on the proposed constitutional changes as evidence of Bermudan opinion. [73473]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our policy is to encourage the widest possible public consultation throughout the constitutional review process. Reliable and published opinion polls can play a part in that.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria he proposes to use to determine whether there is consensus in Bermuda on the proposed changes to the electoral system. [73474]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We propose to take into account the report of the Constituency Boundaries Commission, which itself invited the views of the public, the subsequent debate in the Bermuda House of Assembly, and any other available evidence of public opinion in Bermuda.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department will make public the UK Civil Service College review of the Bermudan Civil Service. [73475]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Review of the Bermuda Public Service was commissioned by the Government of Bermuda. It is for them to decide when and if the report should be published.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it his Department's policy to convene a constitutional conference to discuss proposed changes to Bermuda's constitution; and if he will make a statement. [73476]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A Constitutional Conference has neither been ruled in nor out at this stage. We do not propose to reach a judgement on the case for a further process until we have received the report of the Constituency Boundaries Commission and there has been an opportunity for the House of Assembly in Bermuda to discuss the report.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Bermudan Government have made to his Department explaining why it wishes to reduce the size of the House of Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [73477]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The current Government of Bermuda have made it clear that they favour a move from dual to single-seat constituencies. This commitment was part of their 1998 election manifesto. The Boundaries Commission are to produce a report, recommending the number and boundaries of constituencies within a margin no fewer than 20 and no greater than 40. The House of Assembly, which at present consists of 40 members, will then debate the report.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken to ensure that financial markets beyond those of the EU and Switzerland are off-limits to those members of the ZANU-PF whose assets are frozen. [72300]

Mr. Macshane: Article 6 of the EU Common Position of 18 February, which imposed an assets freeze on senior members of the Mugabe regime, made clear that the EU "shall encourage third States to adopt restrictive measures similar to those contained in this Common Position".

The EU Accession States, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland have followed the EU's lead. The Government has made private representations to a number of countries to adopt similar measures. These efforts are on-going.

Burundi

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Burundi; and if he will make a statement. [73014]

Mr. Macshane: The conflict in Burundi has led to abuses of human rights and humanitarian standards by all sides. We have repeatedly called on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and continue to register our concerns over human rights in Burundi in bilateral political discussions. We have also given material support to the Ministry for Human Rights in Burundi and the UN Human Rights Field Office in Burundi.

SADC

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the SADC Parliamentary Forum's electoral norms and standards; and what steps the Government are taking to promote them in Africa. [72299]

Mr. Macshane: Through our High Commission in Windhoek we are in contact with the Secretary General of the SADC Parliamentary Forum. We welcome the adoption of the Electoral Norms and Standards by the Parliamentary Forum.

We welcome, too, the African Union's declaration on the principles governing democratic elections in Africa issued in Durban earlier this month.

We provide support to countries in Africa that are holding elections to assist them in meeting internationally recognised standards.

BAe Systems

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations have been carried out by UK agencies into the bribery allegations in the contract between BAe Systems and the Government of Qatar. [72546]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* I have been asked to reply. At the request of the Attorney General of Jersey, the Director of the Serious Fraud Office exercised her powers under section 2 of the Criminal Justice Act 1987 to obtain information in connection with criminal investigations that he was conducting concerning the affairs of the Yaheeb Trusts and the Havana Trust and their associated entities in Jersey. No other UK agencies conducted investigations. The Attorney General's criminal investigations are now concluded.

TRANSPORT

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 10 June, *Official Report,* columns 781–782W, on rail safety, if he will list those occasions on which an incident involved trains or road vehicles carrying *(a)* hazardous substances and *(b)* nuclear flasks; and if he will make a statement. [62180]

Mr. Spellar: The number of road accidents involving vehicles carrying hazardous substances notified to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 since 1997 are provided in the table below:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01(prov)*
Overturning or serious damage to a tank while conveying by road prescribed dangerous substances, or the uncontrolled release or fire involving the substance being conveyed	49	28	21	26
Uncontrolled release or escape of a dangerous substance, or a fire involving the dangerous substance, when being conveyed by road in a vehicle	40	24	44	74

The number of rail accidents involving trains carrying hazardous substances registered by HSE's HM Railway Inspectorate since 1997 are in the table below:

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02 (prov)*
Rail accidents involving trains transporting dangerous goods	15	11	4	4	16

Information on accidents and incidents involving the transport of radioactive material in the UK is published annually and placed in the Libraries of the House. The latest report, "Radiological Consequences resulting from Accidents and Incidents involving the Transport of Radioactive Materials in the UK—2000 Review, National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB)-M120", was published in October 2001. Data is still being collated for the 2001 report and is not yet available.

"Transport 2010"

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the planned review of "Transport 2010" will be accompanied by a published environmental appraisal. [63500]

Mr. Jamieson: We plan to publish a progress report on the 10 Year Plan in the autumn. This will include details of progress towards environmental objectives.

Underground

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the backlog of *(a)* maintenance and *(b)* renewal work on the London Underground was for each of the last three years. [67787]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* This is a matter for London Underground.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers *(a)* he and *(b)* the Mayor of London (i) have and (ii) will have to place the Tube Infracos into administration; under what legislation these powers are in place; and if he will make a statement. [70813]

Mr. Jamieson: Neither the Secretary of State nor the Mayor have, or will have, any powers to place the infrastructure companies into administration. Decisions on such matters are, and will remain, for the Courts. Under the Insolvency Act 1986 (as modified by the Greater London Authority Act 1999), the Courts may consider and act upon a petition from any person (including the Secretary of State and the Mayor) for administration or winding-up of a company.

Additionally, sections 220–224 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 specify the circumstances under which the Courts could make a PPP administration order. Such an order would bring into effect a special administration regime designed to allow for the continued operation of a safe and effective passenger service. The Secretary of State has the power to make the Rules of the special administration regime.

Air Traffic Centre

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place a copy of the report by the Health and Safety Executive on IT systems in operation at Swanwick and West Drayton in the Library. [70735]

Mr. Jamieson: No. There are statutory restrictions on the disclosure of information obtained by HSE in pursuance of its powers which apply to the HSE report on the IT System at Swanwick. National Air Traffic Services are working with HSE, the Civil Aviation Authority and the trade unions to resolve any issues associated with the new working environment at Swanwick.

There is no corresponding HSE report on the IT System at West Drayton air traffic control centre.

Road Deaths

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will analyse the results from Holland and other countries where traffic lights have been removed in an attempt to reduce road deaths; and if he will make a statement. [73687]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department is always interested in ways of making roads safer for all, especially for vulnerable road users, and in reducing unnecessary street furniture. My officials will be looking at the work in The Netherlands and elsewhere, and at the context in which it is being done, to see what lessons may be transferable to this country.

Traffic lights

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take powers to prevent local authorities and elected mayors from altering the timing on traffic lights other than for the purpose of improving traffic flows commensurate with safety. [72952]

Mr. Spellar: The timing of traffic signals depends on many factors, including the layout of junctions, the movements and types of vehicles to be accommodated at the junction and the proximity of junctions to each other, as well as the numbers of vehicles and pedestrians. We look to local authorities and elected mayors to provide for the safe and efficient passage of all road users and to ensure the smooth flow of traffic.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

BSE

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what legal action she will take in relation to the incident in Wales last November whereby meat from the offspring of a cow with BSE entered the human food chain. [28689]

Mr. Morley: The case has been investigated and a warning letter has been sent to the farmers concerned. Offspring cull procedures have been tightened up.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she plans to take to ensure that the Sustainability Fund is used to deliver environmental improvements in localities where the extractive activities incurring the aggregates levy occur. [30167]

Mr. Meacher: The Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund will be distributed through the Countryside Agency, English Heritage, English Nature, WRAP, DTI's Construction Innovation and Research Management Programme, ODPM's Planning Research and Clean Up programmes and DfT's Freight Facilities Grant.

Of the total £58.6 million available in England over the next two years, £29.5 million has been allocated to projects designed to reduce the local effects of aggregates extraction, and £1.6 million to a local authority pilot project run by Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Somerset County Councils.

Glazebury-on-Wye Bridge

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the hon. Member for Leominster will receive a response to his letter of 29 October 2001 concerning the new flood-warning monitor at Glazebury-on-Wye bridge. [38272]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 13 February.

Correspondence

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will answer the letter of Mr. J. C. Dixon, received on 8 November 2001, a constituent. [40846]

Mr. Morley: The Department has no record of Mr. Dixon's letter.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when he expects to reply to the letter of 29 October 2001 from the hon. Member for Leominster on behalf of a constituent, Mr. M. J. Cox. [45331]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 13 August.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Fareham, dated 18 January, concerning his constituent Mr. Broadbridge. [45811]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 30 July.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she intends to write to the hon. Member for Hertsmere regarding the case of Mr. T Haworth of Radlett, as referred to in the letter from the then Minister of State in her letter of December 2000, ref. 148710; [56555]

(2) when she plans to answer the question tabled on 10 May from the hon. Member for Hertsmere, ref 56555; [64475]

(3) when she plans to reply to the question tabled on 10 May by the hon. Member for Hertsmere regarding the case of Mr. T. Haworth of Radlett, ref 56555. [73411]

Mr. Morley: My noble Friend Lord Whitty wrote to the hon. Member on 31 July with an undertaking that officials would look into Mr. Haworth's case urgently.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will answer the letter from the hon. Member for Canterbury dated 21 December 2001, ref radiation, emissions and pollution. [57783]

Mr. Meacher: I responded to the hon. Member's letter on 10 September.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Wilcockson, constituents, regarding the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme; [61402]

(2) when she will reply to correspondence from the hon. Member for West Suffolk of October 2001 in respect of his constituents, Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Wilcockson, regarding the home energy efficiency scheme. [70449]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 30 July.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters of the hon. Member for Hexham of 19 March, ref. 167263, and 21 February, ref. 167311, in respect of compensation claims for foot and mouth disease. [65543]

Mr. Morley: Responses were sent to the hon. Member on 14 and 15 August.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the letter of the hon. Member for Hexham of 7 March, ref. 167576. [65646]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* A response was sent to the hon. Member on 14 August.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the letter of the hon. Member for Hexham of 3 December 2001, ref. 160528. [65647]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* A response was sent to the hon. Member on 14 August.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed dated 15 February and 18 April concerning an outbreak of scab in Northumberland. [65095]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 July 2002]:* A reply was sent to the right hon. Member on 30 July.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when he will respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan of 17 May regarding the future of farming. [67698]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 26 July.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when he will respond to the letters from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan of 31 January, 10 April and 5 June regarding the corporate sector's role in delivering sustainable development. [67649]

Mr. Morley: The hon. Member's letters have been transferred to the Department of Trade and Industry who have responsibility for the particular issues raised.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the letters of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire of 25 February, 9 April and 23 May regarding the future of farming in the United Kingdom. [63182]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 24 July.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter to her dated 18 June from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. M. Wood. [72146]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to my right hon. Friend on 26 July.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes of 10 June about GM seeds. [71270]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* A response was sent to the hon. Member on 12 August.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the *letter from* the hon. Member for Totnes of 22 May concerning EU regulations on GM foods. [71271]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 29 August.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 18 and 19 March; what the Government's stance was and how it voted on each issue discussed; and if she will make a statement. [45105]

Margaret Beckett: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture Council in Brussels on 18 March.

The Council agreed by qualified majority the aid arrangements to apply to tobacco production for the years 2002–04. A welcome small reduction in, and some re-orientation of, support was agreed, but the Council as a whole was unwilling to endorse a commitment to the eventual phasing out of support to this sector. The UK made clear its continued strong opposition to supporting tobacco production and abstained in the vote.

The Council unanimously agreed proposals for aid in the nut sector. I joined several other member states in noting that the measures concerned were intended to be time-limited and that we would be unwilling to endorse any extension of them.

The Council took stock of the EU Enlargement negotiations on agriculture; and on Tuesday EU Ministers met the agriculture Ministers of the applicant countries to hear their appreciation of key issues.

Spain tabled a memorandum on the possible use of insurance as a risk management tool in agriculture and reported frost damage to some of its olive groves; Germany tabled a note on the Mid Term Review of Agenda 2000 and raised concerns about the monitoring of residues in food products imported from third countries; and France drew attention to pressures on the EU cereals markets.

GM Foods

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment was in possession of relevant data when assessing T25 maize under the genetically modified foods approval procedure; and if she will make a statement. [54344]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* The application to market T25 maize was submitted to the French competent authority under Directive 90/220/EEC in 1995. Having assessed the application and being content that all relevant data was available, the French competent authority forwarded the application to other Member States via the Commission with a favourable opinion. ACRE considered the dossier on T25 maize in June 1996 and gave their advice. Subsequently, and following a favourable opinion from the European Commission Scientific Committee on Plants, the application was approved and consent issued by the French on behalf of the EU in August 1998.

In the light of the seed listing hearing on Chardon LL, and following an open meeting of ACRE that considered issues raised during the hearing, ACRE are in the process of drafting further advice concerning T25 maize. This advice will be completed and published during the summer.

Warm Front Initiative

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the number of people experiencing delays when seeking improvements to their homes under the Warm Front initiative. [56205]

(2) what assessment she has made of the progress of the Department's Warm Front initiative; and if she will make a statement. [56204]

Mr. Meacher: The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme for England is marketed as the Warm Front Team. To date Warm Front has assisted over 350,000 households and spent over £180 million on installing measures.

The two Scheme Managers have target times for completion work. These are set at 40 days for insulation measures, and 120 days for heating measures. The table below shows the number of households receiving either a central heating system or insulation measures and the time taken from survey to completion of work:

Waiting times between 1 June 2000 and 31 March 2002

Central heating	
Total number of households in sample	*66,600*
Waiting time less than 120 days	33,100
Waiting time greater than 120 days	33,500
Insulation	
Total number of households in sample	*311,200*
Waiting time less than 40 days	91,900
Waiting time greater than 40 days	219,300

There is usually a period of 1–8 weeks between the date of actual installation and receipt of the invoice from installers.

The Scheme Managers provide monthly performance reports covering delivery against targets, customer care and heating capacity. There have been delays in the installation of measures under the scheme, but my Department is working closely with the Scheme Managers to address these problems.

Some applicants to the scheme have experienced delays due to the national shortage of gas heating engineers. To help address this problem my Department has funded training courses to provide additional qualified engineers to work under the scheme.

In addition, over 290,000 households receive assistance in 2001–02 against an original target of 228,000. This will also have impacted upon timelines, although it is not possible to quantify the affect at this time.

We will carry out a review of Warm Front during this financial year to look at how effective its delivery has been, the issues faced, solutions found, examples of best practice and future priorities.

Public Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60149]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 8 June 2001, indicating the *(a)* length and *(b)* number of responses received in each case. [68707]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Information on public consultation processes undertaken by DEFRA is held in the public domain and can be obtained from the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.UK. in the section titled "Consultation Exercises". Contact details regarding each consultation are provided. Responses to public consultations where the respondents have not asked for anonymity are also listed on this website page.

Further analysis of the responses to these processes could only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60901]

Mr. Morley: I refer the honourable member to my earlier replies given to him on 26 March, *Official Report*, columns 828–89W, and to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Alex Salmond) on 18 July, *Official Report*, column 474W.

The centralised budget allocation for DEFRA's Communications Directorate publicity group for the financial year 2002–03 is £4.1million.

The process of allocating funds within this budget for expenditure on media advertising and campaigns is structured to be flexible and responsive to changing priorities. Each project is evaluated, and a budget estimated and costed, on a case by case basis, except for those instances when UK statutes or EU directives require that press and advertising campaigns should be undertaken.

Sheep

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which breeds of sheep are defined by her Department as rare breeds. [61551]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 June 2002]:* DEFRA currently uses the Rare Breeds Survival Trust Priority List for rare breeds of sheep, as defined by them under seven distinct categories. A copy of this list has been placed in the Library of the House. It is also updated and published quarterly in "The Ark", the journal of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust.

BSE in Sheep

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's response to the recommendations of the Food Standards Agency's report on BSE and Sheep, May 2002 concerning the development of a rapid diagnostic test for BSE in sheep. [64116]

Margaret Beckett: The report by the Food Standards Agency's Core Stakeholder Group is fully consistent with existing Government policy in this respect. The development of methods and tests that can distinguish between scrapie and sheep is a key focus for research.

Indeed, DEFRA has long recognised the need for a rapid test which can reliably distinguish a "BSE-like" strain of TSE agent from the strains known to represent traditional scrapie. For example, there are two different technologies being studied at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency which show some promise in this regard.

A modified version of the Western Blot is now being used (in addition to standard Histopathology and Immunohistochemistry) for statutory testing of all clinical scrapie suspects in GB and for retrospective testing of archived case material. So far, there have been no results which would suggest a "BSE-like" strain.

Work on differential testing is not limited to the UK. DEFRA also monitors and collaborates on research developments throughout the world. The European Commission's Scientific Steering Committee recently published a strategy to apply a common protocol for testing scrapie cases for BSE across Europe.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what information and instructions EU member state Governments received from the European Union in respect of the outbreak of foot and mouth in KwaZulu-Natal last year; [280]

(2) what response the Government made to information and instructions received from the European Union in respect of the outbreak of foot and mouth in KwaZulu-Natal last year. [281]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I regret that this reply has been overlooked. The Standing Veterinary Committee (SVC) first received a report from the European Commission of an unconfirmed foot and mouth outbreak in KwaZulu-Natal on 19–20 September 2000. On 3–4 October 2000 the Commission informed the SVC of two confirmed outbreaks and tabled background information of the action taken by the South African authorities. On 18 October 2000 the SVC was informed

of one further outbreak and that a Commission inspection visit to South Africa was expected to take place on 23 October 2000.

On 7–8 November 2000 the European Commission informed the SVC of the outcome of the inspection and indicated that safeguard measures may be necessary. On 17 November 2000 the Commission adopted Decision 2000/739/EC formally stopping imports of fresh meat into the Community from 16 districts in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. On 5 December 2000 the Commission informed the SVC of an outbreak in Swaziland linked to the South African outbreaks. They confirmed that no export certificates could be signed by either country. At the SVC on 20 December 2000 the Commission reported there had been no change in the situation.

As there had been no significant improvement in the situation in South Africa, the Government took a decision to take additional safeguard measures by formally stop imports of meat of FMD susceptible species.

On 5 January 2001 the Government took measures under the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996, prohibiting fresh meat imports from all of South Africa. A note explaining the situation was sent to trade interests on 8 January 2001, as was a letter to all UK Border Inspection Posts at ports and airports. Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar action shortly afterwards.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when the European Union converted its temporary suspension on South African meat imports into a formal import ban following the outbreak of foot and mouth in KwaZulu-Natal; and how the terms of the ban differed from those of the suspension; [213]

(2) for what period and on which products and geographical areas the European Union imposed a temporary suspension of South African livestock imports following the outbreak of foot and mouth in KwaZulu-Natal last year. [212]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I regret that this reply has been overlooked. Technically there is no difference between a suspension and a ban.

In October 2000 the European Commission advised the Standing Veterinary Committee (SVC) that with effect from 21 September 2000, the South African authorities had stopped the issue of export certificates for fresh meat from 16 districts of the province of KwaZulu-Natal following an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. On 17 November 2000, the Commission adopted a Decision to formally stop the importation of fresh meat of foot and mouth disease susceptible species from the same 16 districts by amending the relevant Community legislation. The districts were as follows: Camperdown, Pietermaritzburg, Lions River, New Hanover, Umvoti, Kranskop, Mapumulo, Ndwedwe, Lower Tugela, Inanda, Pinetown, Durban, (including the metropolitan area of Durban), Chatsworth, Umzali, Umbumbulu and Richmond.

In August 2001, following sufficient guarantees from the South African authorities with regard to the control measures taken, some restrictions were lifted. Community restrictions remain in place in respect of the following areas:

the part of the foot-and-mouth disease control area situated in the veterinary regions of Mpumalanga and Northern provinces, in the district of Ingwavuma of the veterinary region of Natal and in the border area with Botswana east of longitude 28°, and the district of Camperdown, in the province of KwaZula-Natal.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information the letters sent by MAFF to border inspection posts and traders after 5 January included concerning *(a)* foot and mouth in KwaZulu-Natal last year and *(b)* outbreaks in other South African provinces. [427]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* I regret that this reply has been overlooked. On 8 January 2001, traders and Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) were advised that the importation into England and Wales of fresh meat of FMD susceptible species from South Africa was prohibited unless it was produced before 15 September 2000. They were also advised that certain other products of animal origin derived from FMD susceptible species including meat products, blood and blood products, milk products and colostrum and bones, horns, hooves and products thereof may not be able to meet appropriate EU or GB certification requirements.

On 14 June 2001 a Declaration was issued in accordance with Regulation 35 of the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996 permitting, in accordance with Community legislation, the importation into England and Wales of fresh meat of FMD susceptible species from those areas in South Africa where FMD is not present. Copies of the relevant letter to the trade and the Declaration are available on our website:

http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/int-trde/default.htm

On 22 June a further Declaration and letters to traders and BIPS were issued in respect of the importation from South Africa of game meat. The letters also clarified the position with regard to imports of sheep meat as a result of an error in Community legislation.

Fishing

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the introduction of a system of individual transferable quotas across the EU. [64544]

Mr. Morley: Under the current EU rules the Total Allowable Catch for each fish stock is apportioned between Member States according to the principle of "relative stability". It is then for individual Member States to decide how the quota should be allocated to their fishing industries. We believe that this arrangement offers significant advantages in terms of flexibility and meeting the different needs of the fishing industries in different Member States. While we would, of course, consider carefully any proposal for a system of individual transferable quotas across the EU, it is not clear that such a system would yield greater benefits than the current arrangements.

Litter

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment *(a)* has been and *(b)* is planned (i) by and (ii) for her Department on the problem of litter for (A) local authority

roads, (B) trunk roads and motorways, (C) railway lines and (D) canals and other waterways; and if she will make a statement. [64740]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Protection Act 1990: Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse defines standards of cleanliness for various locations and specifies periods of time within which any particular area should be returned to the appropriate standard, should it fall to a lower standard.

The Highways Agency is responsible for litter clearance on motorways and a few all-purpose trunk roads transferred under section 86(11) of the Act. All other roads are the responsibility of the local Districts and Borough Councils in respect of litter and refuse.

The managing agents and contractors employed by Highways Agency carry out daily safety patrols and weekly safety inspections on the motorways during which they also report on instances of litter accumulation. The contractor then removes litter to achieve the overall cleanliness standards set out in the Code.

The Highways Agency aims to secure continuous improvement in its routine maintenance through a move towards performance related procurement for all new contracts. One of the performance criteria of these new contracts is an environmental amenity index that examines the overall appearance of the road taking account of litter and debris, grass cutting, weed growth, cleanliness and visibility of signs.

Under the Pathfinder Programme, which I launched last year to address, amongst other local environment quality issues, ways of tackling litter in canals and other waterways, a methodology is being developed for DEFRA which allow the problem to be assessed.

It is planned that this methodology will be developed into a code of best practice for use on canals and other waterways.

I understand that Railtrack have in hand a national programme to ensure that the lineside is clear from surplus engineering material and debris by October 2002; and that systems are in place by the following month to prevent the future build-up of such material.

Radioactive Waste

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what representations she has received regarding the consultation on radioactive waste management; and if she will make a statement; [64793]

(2) what action she plans in relation to radioactive waste management; and if she will make a statement; [64730]

(3) what steps she *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to change (i) guidance and (ii) legislation relating to radioactive waste management; and if she will make a statement; [64796]

(4) what public consultation *(a)* has taken place and *(b)* is planned in relation to radioactive waste management; and if she will make a statement. [64797]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the letter of 29 July from my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State. She wrote to all Members with the results of the consultation on radioactive waste management, and announced the next steps of the policy making process.

The consultation on *Managing radioactive waste safely*, published by the UK Government and the devolved administrations, ran from 12 September 2001 to 12 March 2002 and 330 responses were received. A summary of the responses has been placed in the Library of the House, and those of the devolved administrations. The summary lists other events during the consultation period, including recommendations from two Parliamentary Select Committees and a number of research reports. Copies of individual responses are available in my Department's Library, and in those of the relevant Departments in the devolved administrations.

In her letter, my right hon. Friend said that the Government and the devolved administrations had considered these responses and recommendations and decided the next steps in the policy process. In particular, we propose to press ahead with a review of waste management options. The review will seek the views of interested stakeholders, the public and government departments. We will appoint an independent body to oversee the review process which will make recommendations on the option, or combination of options, for managing radioactive waste which would achieve long-term protection for people and the environment. We will review all options and revise the timetable to a four stage process rather than five as proposed in the original consultation.

The review process must engage with stakeholders and the public. The review will therefore start by setting the framework for debate by establishing broad agreement on the wastes to be considered, the range of management options for each of them, and the criteria against which these options should be assessed. We want to promote a dynamic and extensive process of public engagement. This approach, coupled with regular reports to our Parliaments and Assemblies, will reach far more people and encourage active involvement in decision making, rather than occasional opportunities to react to consultation papers.

The waste from our existing nuclear facilities will arise over the next century or so. So we intend, in assessing management options, to include not only materials currently classified as waste but also to consider the consequences of providing for other materials which may have to be managed as waste during the period, such as some separated plutonium, and uranium, as well as certain quantities of spent nuclear fuel.

We propose that the new body will be in place by the end of the year. Over the summer and autumn, we shall publish more detailed proposals. These will include details of the new body and its terms of reference. They will also address pressing issues such as arrangements for managing waste safely in the short-term and an announcement on waste substitution. We shall report progress on the other issues covered in the consultation, including decommissioning nuclear sites, the powers of the Environment Agencies, managing spent sealed sources of radioactivity, and waste classification.

In the meantime we are not planning any changes to legislation or guidance on this issue.

GMOs

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Biotech Unit will update its public register on the list of trial sites where GMOs may be released to include the list of sites where winter oil seed rape was planted last autumn for research and development. [65588]

Mr. Meacher: Aventis, the consent holder, notified the Joint Regulatory Authority (Biotech Unit) of the proposed locations of trial sites for planting of winter oil seed rape last autumn on 26, 27 and 31 July 2001. In all cases the location of trial sites was added to the Public Register within 2 working days.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether *(a)* scientific assessments, *(b)* peer reviews and *(c)* field scale evaluations outside the formal regulatory process will be a pre-requisite for investment in new start-up companies carrying out research and development in agricultural biotechnology. [65518]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

Scientific assessment, peer review and regulatory requirements are all important factors in the normal due diligence exercise carried out by any investor in new high technology ventures.

GM Crops

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the scientific steering committee will next meet to decide locations for the farm scale evaluations of genetically modified crops. [66170]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 2 July 2002]:* The Scientific Steering Committee considered the proposed locations of the next round of farm-scale evaluations, autumn-sown oil seed rape, by correspondence. The SSC's formal advice has been published on their web-site as previously they deliberated at length the criteria for selection during several early meetings. By the time of this year's selection, however, the process has become efficient enough to be confidently agreed by correspondence without the need for everyone to travel to a meeting.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of GM crops authorised for commercial use in the United States her Department has DNA samples of; and if she will make a statement. [71253]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Department does not hold samples of GM crops authorised for commercial use in the in the United States. GM crops are only permitted to be imported into EU countries if they also have consent under EU directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms to the the environment. Importers must ensure that grain and seed imports have the necessary authorisation. DEFRA's GM inspectorate at the Central Scientific Laboratory (CSL) carry out audits to check compliance. CSL has the capability to perform tests to check for unauthorised GM presence as necessary. The tests look, for non-specific DNA sequences that are characteristic of the genetic modification process.

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she has established a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved. [66731]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The Government is committed to making sure that policies are inclusive and take full account of the needs and experiences of those affected by them.

Guidance on building this approach into all policy development and implementation was issued to all Divisions which now make up DEFRA. Whilst no baseline has been established since the creation of DEFRA, current consultation arrangements aim to ensure that there is no differential impact on different groups of the population such as men or women, ethnic minorities or those from particular age groups.

In addition, the Department's draft Equality Scheme required by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, sets out the proposed actions in respect of its duties to promote equality between different racial groups.

Progress has been made in embedding awareness of the need to take account of diversity and equality not only in employment but also in delivering policies. However, there is more to be done and we are currently considering further ways to ensure that our procedures reflect these aims.

Women's Organisations

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the women's organisations which have been consulted on proposed legislation by her Department since its creation; and whether their responses have been published. [66734]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* DEFRA guidance on consultations, and that previously available in the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, stresses the importance of including in consultation exercises all relevant interest groups, including consumer and general public interest groups. Included in the list of relevant bodies in the guidance are the Women's National Commission, the Co-operative Women's Guild, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the National Housewives Association and the Townswomen's Guilds. Other organisations are added to individual consultation exercises according to the subject matter, however no central register of all bodies consulted in a particular period is kept.

Individual responses are not generally published but can be obtained from the DEFRA library on request, for which an administrative charge is made to cover photocopying and postage.

Departmental Data

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new data

series, separated by *(a)* gender, *(b)* race, *(c)* disability and *(d)* age have been commissioned by her Department since it was created. [66730]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The June Agricultural Census collects data on employment in agriculture and horticulture broken down by gender, and the Department also runs a survey which collects information on the earnings of these workers by gender. However, no new questions were introduced with the creation of DEFRA. In 2003 a labour survey will be conducted as part of the EC farm structure surveys. This will ask questions broken down by age and gender.

DEFRA's draft Equality Scheme, required under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, sets out the actions required to meet the duty and over time it is possible that this will lead to the commissioning of new data series on ethnicity if this is identified as being necessary.

Internally, data is collected on gender, disability, age and race. Personnel procedures which may have an impact on applicants and staff are monitored, broken down by gender race and disability and sometimes also by age. A new monitoring programme is being finalised which will take account of the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and, as far as possible, forthcoming legislation on sexual orientation, religion and age.

Gender Impact Assessments

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the subjects of the gender impact assessments drawn up by her Department since its creation, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [66732]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* Guidance on ensuring that polices and procedures are inclusive and take full account of the needs and experiences of those affected by them has been issued to all Divisions which now make up DEFRA.

The guidance requires, among other things, the preparation of an impact analysis during policy development in cases where there is a possibility of differential impact on different groups such as men and women. Whilst no formal impact assessments have been drawn up since the creation of DEFRA, current consultation arrangements ensure that a good range of organisations, including those representing women, have been contacted for their views on a wide range of issues proposals.

Swill-Feeding

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risk to animal health from the import of pig meat and other products from countries where the animals have been fed swill. [68489]

Margaret Beckett: The risk of introduction of serious pig diseases is addressed by the European Community rules governing the import of pig meat and other products. These are designed to ensure that animals carrying disease, however it may have been transmitted, cannot be slaughtered and sent for export to member states.

Committee Mandates

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Committee for the Adaptation to Technical and Scientific Progress and Implementation of the Directive on the Deliberate Release into the Environment of Genetically Modified Organisms is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68548]

Mr. Meacher: The European Commission has not set a date for the next meeting of the regulatory committee established under Directive 2001–2018/EC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms.

The committee comprises representatives from member states, and the UK is usually represented by an official from this department. DEFRA is the UK lead department for international relations on these matters. The devolved administrations are fully involved in the preparation for regulatory committee discussions, and in any relevant follow-up work arising from them.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the Directive on procedures for the surveillance and monitoring of environments concerned by waste from the titanium dioxide industry is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68564]

Mr. Meacher: The role of the Committee, which is set out in Article 10 of the Council Directive 82/882/EEC (OJ L 378, 31/12/1982, p. 1), is to give its opinion on any measures proposed by the Commission which are necessary to adapt the Decision's provisions to technical or scientific progress. This Committee has not met for more than 5 years and there are no meetings scheduled. Therefore the most recent meeting predated the establishment of the Scottish Executive in 1999, and potential UK representation has not been addressed. In the event of any meeting being scheduled, officials in this Department would, as a matter of course, liaise with their counterparts in the Scottish Executive.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in her Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68733]

Mr. Morley: All overseas travel by officials in my Department is undertaken in accordance with the principles set in Chapter 8 of the *Civil Service Management Code*, and the detailed rules and guidance are set out in our Departmental staff handbook.

The detailed information requested about individual trips is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zone

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the administrative and regulatory costs to the Environment Agency of designating *(a)* 55 per cent. and *(b)* 100 per cent. of England as a nitrate vulnerable zone. [68103]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* Following a detailed consideration of all the issues raised during the consultation process, the Government announced on 27 June that it intends to adopt the targeted approach, and designate 55 per cent. of England as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs).

The Environment Agency is in the process of assessing the costs and resources required for administering and enforcing the new designations under the Nitrates Directive. Initial indications are that both options cost around £2 million each, excluding costs arising from staff training and resolving boundary disputes. This similarity between costs arises because even if the whole territory had been designated, the Agency would have adopted the same priority based approach to enforcement that it will be using in the newly designated areas.

Illegal Timber Imports

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the illegal importation of timber from the Amazon basin. [69487]

Mr. Meacher: Imports of illegally logged timber can only be seized at import by HM Customs and Excise where the timber concerned is covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and can be identified as having been imported in breach of its requirements. The same is true of other Member States of the EU. Thus, even if producing countries establish independent verification of legal compliance with chain-of-custody tracking to ensure timber was legally or illegally logged, Customs cannot seize or reject imports of illegally logged timber unless they are covered by CITES. New EU-wide legislation is needed to empower customs authorities to prevent entry of illegally logged timber. The UK is working within the EU to identify what legislation is needed and how it can be introduced.

Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste list published in February 2001 will come into force in the United Kingdom. [69234]

Mr. Meacher: The UK will implement the European Waste Catalogue which now incorporates the Hazardous Waste List as part of its review of the Special Waste Regulations. A second round of consultation on the review will take place later this year and amended regulations are likely to come into force during 2003.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is for disposal of waste by landfill for each London borough in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the last five years; and what her Department's prediction is for 2003–04. [71111]

Mr. Meacher: Estimates on the disposal of waste by landfill are collected from London boroughs in the Department's annual Municipal Waste Management Survey. Four year's results from 1996–97 to 1999–2000 are set out in the table below. The latest data for 2000–01 will become available in August.

In view of local authority recycling and composting targets and the forthcoming Landfill Directive targets to reduce the amount of biodegradable waste to landfill, we would expect to see disposal to landfill by local authorities to begin to decline over the next few years.

Municipal Waste sent to Landfill thousand tonnes

	Type	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
London Borough of Bexley	UA	66	37	37	42
Corporation of London	UA	59	64	68	70
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	UA	89	89	84	92
Westminster City Council	UA	91	91	117	107
London Borough of Greenwich	UA	15	23	23	47
London Borough of Lewisham	UA	3	3	3	6
London Borough of Southwark	UA	101	108	112	114
London Borough of Bromley	UA	144	153	150	169
London Borough of Croydon	UA	158	168	165	169
London Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames	UA	71	69	64	70
London Borough of Merton	UA	91	94	96	99
London Borough of Sutton	UA	66	66	81	77
East London Waste Authority	WDA	382	404	432	459
North London Waste Authority	WDA	351	444	457	380
West London Waste Authority	WDA	704	704	711	759
Western Riverside Waste Authority	WDA	441	458	454	462
Total		2832	2975	3053	3124

UA—Unitary Authority

WDA—Waste Disposal Authority

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the available landfill waste disposal capacity for London boroughs; and if she plans to increase capacity. [71112]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The availability of landfill capacity is a commercial matter for waste management companies. It is however recognised that suitable sites for landfill in the south-east of England are diminishing and planning authorities should take this into account. While the Government accepts that landfill has a part to play in waste disposal, it believes that the re-use, recycling and recovery of waste offers a much more sustainable future.

Reprocessing

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the capacity is in the United Kingdom for the reprocessing of *(a)* paper, *(b)* wood and *(c)* plastic. [69116]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) estimates that the UK capacity for the recycling of paper, wood and plastic is as follows:

Paper

Recycling Options	*2001 est. (Kt)*
Newsprint	1320
Packaging	2600
Other grades e.g. tissue	Tbc
	3920

Wood

Capacity and utilisation estimates for the UK. Sources: Timber Packaging and Pallet Confederation (TIMCON), Wood Recyclers Assocation (WRA), Wood Panel Industries Federation (WPIF) and The Composting Association (TCA).

Recycling Options	*2001 actual (Kt)*	*Est. capacity 2002 (Kt)*
Panel board manufacturing	675	750
Other mechanical recycling	30	50
Composting	65	80
	770	930

Note:
The forecast capacities for 2002 are derived from current industry estimates that are based on prevailing economic circumstances and the availability of wood waste (predominantly packaging material) that is suitable for recycling. The actual infrastructure is capable of consuming more wood waste but its further uptake is constrained by economic and technical barriers.

Plastics

Capacity and utilisation estimates for the UK. Source British Plastic Federation (BPF)—Recycling Council (RC).

Recycling stages	*Capacity (Kt)*	*Utilisation (Kt)*
Washing	45	17
Shred/granulate	400	200
melt process	400	250

Note:
The utilisation level is subject to market conditions as virgin or other non recycled material can replace recycled material if it becomes cheap enough or availability of recycled drops off.

The figures are derived from a market study recently delivered to WRAP for which the analysis of results is incomplete. Therefore, the information should be treated as indicative only. More detailed estimates will be generated in due course.

Consultation

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many consultation documents published in 2001 in *(a)* electronic and *(b)* printed form her Department has monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations. [69848]

Mr. Morley: All consultations were available in both electronic and printed form. Each was monitored and evaluated against key criteria set out in the Code of Practice on Written Consultations and which formed part of our annual report to Cabinet Office. Information was gathered on the number of consultations undertaken, periods given for responses, how responses were analysed, the level of complaints received about the consultation process, whether written consultations were supplemented by additional public involvement and examples of consultations that had a direct influence on policy or service delivery.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the deadline is for adoption of the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste List into UK law. [69747]

Mr. Meacher: The European Waste Catalogue which now incorporates the Hazardous Waste List came into force in January 2002. It will be implemented in the UK as part of the current review of the Special Waste Regulations. Amended Regulations are likely to come into force in the UK during 2003.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to issue special waste carriers licences to transport end-of-life electrical items that have been reclassified as hazardous waste. [70273]

Mr. Meacher: A licence is not required for the transport of hazardous waste although since 1991 and in accordance with the EC Waste Framework Directive, waste carriers must be registered with the Environment Agency.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the new definitions of waste under the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste list require all end-of-life electrical products to be reclassified as hazardous waste. [70563]

Mr. Meacher: Electrical or electronic equipment must contain hazardous components for them to be classified as hazardous under the European Waste Catalogue. Hazardous components may include accumulators and batteries containing lead, nickel/cadmium or mercury; mercury switches, and glass from cathode ray tubes and other activated glass, CFC or HCFC.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether retailers will be able to continue to offer take-back of end-of-life electrical products through their home delivery networks when this is reclassified as hazardous waste. [70730]

Mr. Meacher: Electrical or electronic equipment will be classified as hazardous waste only if it has hazardous components. We are aware that retailers are concerned that the reclassification may have implications for their take-back schemes and we are looking at ways of minimising any impact.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate has been made of the cost to small businesses of the European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste list. [70731]

Mr. Meacher: The changes to the hazardous waste list, which is now incorporated within the European Waste Catalogue, are likely to lead to increased costs for hazardous waste disposal for many small businesses. A regulatory impact assessment estimating these costs will be published with the forthcoming consultation paper on the review of the UK Special Waste Regulations.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information the Government have given to *(a)* retailers, *(b)* manufacturers, *(c)* local authorities and *(d)* the waste sector on the revision of the hazardous waste list. [70776]

Mr. Meacher: The changes to the hazardous waste list are to be implemented through a Review of the Special Waste Regulations. We issued a consultation paper containing proposed changes in March 2001. We expect to issue a second consultation paper with draft regulations, which will provide more information, in the next few months. We will consider what additional, more detailed guidance will be required for particular sectors.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what restrictions will be imposed on retailers for handling and storing end-of-life electrical products that have been reclassified as electrical waste. [70775]

Mr. Meacher: Electrical or electronic equipment will be classified as hazardous waste only if it has hazardous components. We are aware that retailers are concerned that the reclassification may have implications for their take-back schemes and we are looking at ways of minimising any impact.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste list will provide that retailers' special waste licences will require them to store end-of-life electrical items at places where they will be reclassified as hazardous waste. [71358]

Mr. Meacher: We are aware that retailers are concerned that the reclassification of some electrical items as hazardous may have implications for their storage. We are looking at ways of minimising any impact and will include our recommendations in the forthcoming consultation paper on the review of the UK Special Waste Regulations.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken to ensure that civic amenity sites will be able to continue accepting end-of-life electrical products if they are reclassified as hazardous waste. [71688]

Mr. Meacher: The Spending Review announced on 15 July that additional money would be available to local authorities via the EPCS block in future years. This will enable local authorities to make any modifications to the licence for a civic amenity site that may be necessary. We are aware that local authorities have some concerns about the implementation domestically of the European Waste Catalogue and we are looking at ways of minimising any impact.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the deadline is for adoption of the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste list into UK law; when it will come into force in the United Kingdom; and what estimate has been made of the cost to small businesses when the European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste List comes into force in the UK. [72002]

Mr. Meacher: The European Waste Catalogue, which incorporates the Hazardous Waste List, came into force in January 2002. It will be implemented in the UK as part of the current review of the Special Waste Regulations. Amended Regulations are likely to come into force in the UK during 2003. The changes are likely to lead to increased costs for hazardous waste disposal for many small businesses. A regulatory impact assessment estimating these costs will be published with the forthcoming consultation paper on the review of the UK Special Waste Regulations.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste List will require retailers to have special waste licences to offload and store end-of-life electrical items at stores, depots and yards where they are reclassified as hazardous waste. [71690]

Mr. Meacher: Electrical or electronic equipment will be classified as hazardous waste only if it has hazardous components. We are aware that retailers are concerned that the reclassification may have implications for their take-back schemes and we are looking at ways of minimising any impact. Our recommendations will be outlined in the consultation paper published as part of the current review of the UK Special Waste Regulations.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information the Government have given to *(a)* retailers, *(b)* manufacturing, *(c)* local authorities and *(d)* the waste sector on the revision of the hazardous waste list. [71691]

Mr. Meacher: The changes to the hazardous waste list are to be implemented through a Review of the Special Waste Regulations. We issued a consultation paper containing proposed changes in March 2001. We expect to issue a second consultation paper with draft regulations, which will provide more information, in the next few months. We will consider what additional, more detailed guidance will be required for particular sectors.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste List on UK business. [72004]

Mr. Meacher: The changes to the hazardous waste list, which is now incorporated within the European Waste Catalogue, are likely to lead to increased costs for hazardous waste disposal for many businesses. A regulatory impact assessment estimating these costs will be published with the forthcoming consultation paper on the review of the UK Special Waste Regulations.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the new definitions of waste under the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste List require all end-of-life electrical products to be reclassified as hazardous waste. [72005]

Mr. Meacher: Electrical or electronic equipment must contain hazardous components for them to be classified as hazardous under the European Waste Catalogue. Hazardous components may include accumulators and batteries containing lead, nickel/cadmium or mercury; mercury switches, and glass from cathode ray tubes and other activated glass, CFC or HCFC.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* retailers and *(c)* waste management companies about the impact of the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste List on the UK's disposal and recycling infrastructure. [72021]

Mr. Meacher: We have had informal exchanges with all these stakeholders and are aware of their concerns. We will shortly be consulting on the current review of the UK Special Waste Regulations and will ensure all these groups are fully involved.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether retailers will be able to continue to offer take-back of end-of-life electrical products through their home delivery networks when this is reclassified as hazardous waste; and what plans she has to issue special waste carriers' licences to transport end-of-life electrical items that have been reclassified as hazardous waste. [72003]

Mr. Meacher: Electrical or electronic equipment will be classified as hazardous waste only if it has hazardous components. We are aware that retailers are concerned that the reclassification may have implications for their take-back schemes and we are looking at ways of minimising any impact. Irrespective of this, a licence is not required for the transport of hazardous waste although since 1991 and in accordance with the EC Waste Framework Directive, waste carriers must be registered with the Environment Agency.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what restrictions will be imposed on retailers in handling and storing end-of-life electrical products that have been reclassified as hazardous waste. [71689]

Mr. Meacher: We are aware that retailers are concerned that the reclassification of some electrical items as hazardous may have implications for their handling and storage. We are looking at ways of minimising any impact and will include our recommendations in the forthcoming consultation paper on the review of the UK Special Waste Regulations.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what types of waste previously not hazardous waste will be reclassified as hazardous waste; and what assessment she has made of the effect on disposal routes of the reclassification of waste as hazardous. [71687]

Mr. Meacher: The European Hazardous Waste List (94/904/EC) has recently been extensively revised, and over 200 additions have been made. It will be transposed into UK law as part of the current review of the UK Special Waste Regulations. The most significant additions include end-of-life vehicles containing hazardous liquids or components, electrical equipment containing CFC/HCFC/HFC (fridges/freezers), and the following items if they contain hazardous substances: electrical equipment, contaminated soils, insulation materials, and bottom ash.

Reclassification of waste as hazardous will restrict its disposal via landfill to those sites classified as landfill sites for hazardous waste by the Environment Agency. Landfill site operators should have submitted site conditioning plans (required by 16 July) detailing what classification they are seeking for their site. It is still too early to assess what hazardous waste capacity will be available after 16 July but the waste management industry have informed us that they do not foresee a shortfall.

Mooring (British Waterways)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* highest and *(b)* lowest residential mooring annual charge in London was in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 2001–02. [70144]

Mr. Meacher: British Waterways have provided the following information for these charges:

	1997	*2001*
Highest	£2,645	£7,050
Lowest	£1,346	£1,506

Prices shown are for a 21 metre vessel inclusive of VAT. Historic data for private operators is not available.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average increase in mooring rates charged by British Waterways was for each region in England in each year since 1997. [70148]

Mr. Meacher: British Waterways have provided the following information. Average percentage increases by region in 2002, were:

North West 7.6 per cent.

North East 2.7 per cent.

Midlands 4.6 per cent.

Southern 10.4 per cent.

London 8 per cent.

The information is not readily available in this form for earlier years.

Project Clearwater

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the terms of reference are of British Waterways Project Clearwater. [70147]

Mr. Meacher: Project Clearwater is British Waterway's IT modernisation strategy which secured Departmental approval earlier this year. The project provides a business management system to improve BW's efficiency and to enhance its customer service.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultation has been carried out by British Waterways on their latest review of mooring charges. [70150]

Mr. Meacher: British Waterways have advised that a national review of mooring rates was formally announced in December 2001, following routine consultation meetings and exchanges with national user groups representing boating interests.

A number of national user groups wished to see the previous "matrix score" pricing system retained. Their views were carefully considered, but BW took the view that the matrix did not allow sufficient flexibility for comparison to the private sector and market demand.

All BW moorers were sent details of the increases and the policy underlying them in February. A minimum period of six weeks was allowed for feedback. BW have held discussions with individual boaters and in some cases, have postponed the renewal of mooring permits to allow additional time for consideration.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria are applied by British Waterways in determining a market rent for residential and non-residential moorings. [70149]

Mr. Meacher: British Waterways' Framework Document requires it to charge a market rate for its services as far as practicable. British Waterway's local waterway management units maintain data about all moorings in the area, both those owned by BW and by others. Comparison of this data, together with an assessment of market trends, informs decisions on setting rates.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what average price for *(a)* residential and *(b)* non-residential moorings was charged by British Waterways in each region in England in 2001–02. [70143]

Mr. Meacher: British Waterways have advised that since the majority of their residential moorings are concentrated in London, they do not normally compile this data by region. The average charge for a residential mooring for a 21 metre boat in London in 2001–02 was £2,647. The average charge for a non-residential mooring was £2,079.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average percentage change has been in residential and non-residential mooring fees in London since 1997; and what average percentage change is planned for 2002–03. [70145]

Mr. Meacher: British Waterways have provided the following information. The average rate based on the number of customers is set out below.

	1997 actual	*2001 actual*	*2002–03 planned*
Residential	£1,797	£2,715	£3,285
Non residential	£1,919	£2,797	£2,943

Prices shown are for a 21 metre vessel inclusive of VAT.

This includes data relating to new sites established since 1997. Rates for these sites have been set at relative market rates and have resulted in an increase in average mooring rates. The percentage change since 1997 is 47.7 per cent. The mooring rates for 2002–03 will result in a percentage change of 8 per cent. Historic data for private operators is not available.

Plastic Waste

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the health effects on (i) humans, (ii) animals and (iii) plants caused by the disposal of plastic products. [70259]

Mr. Meacher: Research in this area concentrates on the health effects of waste management in general, rather than being related to specific materials in the waste stream.

The Environment Agency is currently undertaking various projects to improve knowledge of the health impacts of waste management options (including incineration, landfill and waste recovery facilities) and is looking into the development and use of Health Impact Assessments.

My Department recently hosted a seminar to consider where there are gaps in the research on health impacts of all waste management options and to help prioritise future research. Conducting such research will allow local authorities and others to make more informed choices about the range, type and location of facility they wish to operate.

Bushmeat Trade

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from Mr. Clive Laurence from Ciel Logistics; and if her officials intend to meet him to discuss the illegal trade in bushmeat. [70308]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA Ministers have not received any recent representations from Mr. Laurence. He met with the Head of our Illegal Imports Team on 31 May to discuss illegal meat imports generally and the use of x-ray technology specifically. Mr. Laurence was invited to provide relevant evidence of illegal trade in bushmeat to

the disease risk assessment that is currently being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency as part of the Governments' action plan to tackle illegal imports.

EU Waste Regulations

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste List on UK business. [70272]

Mr. Meacher: The changes to the hazardous waste list, which is now incorporated within the European Waste Catalogue, are likely to lead to increased costs for hazardous waste disposal for many businesses. A regulatory impact assessment estimating these costs will be published with the forthcoming consultation paper on the review of the UK Special Waste Regulations.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Advisory Committee on waste management is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70577]

Mr. Meacher: The most recent EU Advisory Committee on Waste Management was held on 27 March 2002. The committee convenes approximately every 6 months. Dates have not been finalised for the next scheduled meeting.

UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations where there are items of sufficient interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 607W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on the prevention and reduction of environmental pollution by asbestos; and if she will make a statement. [73181]

Mr. Meacher: The EU Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on the prevention and reduction of environmental pollution by asbestos has not met since the establishment of the Scottish Executive, so its officials have never attended it.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 21 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 606W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on the Directive on packaging and packaging waste; and if she will make a statement. [73177]

Mr. Meacher: The devolved administrations are kept fully informed of the work of the Committee and may send experts to the meetings if they wish. In this case, the Scottish Executive has judged its interests to be adequately covered by the representation from DTI and DEFRA. The representatives from the DTI and DEFRA on the Committee advance UK interests, and negotiating lines are agreed in advance between the departments and the devolved administrations.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 69W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on the implementation of the Directive establishing a Community policy regarding water; and if she will make a statement. [73170]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 1 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 69W. Since this committee has never met, members of the Scottish Executive have not attended any meetings.

However, other meetings to consider aspects of implementation of the Water Framework Directive have taken place. Representatives from the Scottish Executive regularly attend meetings of the Water Directors of member states. Of late, this group's work has concentrated on the Water Framework Directive. It last met in Valencia on 10–12 June 2002 and a representative of the Scottish Executive attended. Scottish Executive officials also attend meetings of the Strategic Co-ordination Group on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. This group last met on 29–30 April 2002 in Brussels and the UK team included a representative of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1124W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Management Committee for Fisheries Products; and if she will make a statement. [73171]

Mr. Morley: The Scottish Executive has been represented at all of the meetings which took place in the last year.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 124W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Management Committee for the fisheries and aquaculture sector; and if she will make a statement. [73182]

Mr. Morley: In the last six months, the Scottish Executive has been represented at 3 of the 6 meetings which took place.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 691W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee for the implementation of legislation on ambient air quality assessment and management; and if she will make a statement. [73291]

Mr. Meacher: There have been no meetings of this committee so the attendance of members of the Scottish Executive would not have arisen.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 8 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 691W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Advisory Committee for the

implementation of the directive on the reduction of the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels; and if she will make a statement. [73290]

Mr. Meacher: The answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column 691W, said that there had been no meetings of this committee in the last 12 months. That is incorrect: there was a meeting in April 2002. That was the first and only meeting of the committee. No members of the Scottish Executive attended that meeting.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 368–369W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the directive on water intended for human consumption; and if she will make a statement. [73295]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham on 10 June, *Official Report*, column 915–916W.

A representative of the Scottish Executive attended meetings held in November 2001 and in April 2002 of the Committee established under Article 12 of the Drinking Water Directive 1998.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 842W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the Directive on protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources; and if she will make a statement. [73173]

Mr. Morley: In the period from September 2001 (the start of the new session) to date, Scottish Executive officials did not attend any of these meetings

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 371W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Management Committee of the common organisations of agricultural markets for pigmeat; and if she will make a statement. [73178]

Mr. Morley: To date, no members of the Scottish Executive have attended the EU Management Committee of the common organisations of agricultural markets for pigmeat.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 914W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on geographical indications and protected designations of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs; and if she will make a statement. [73292]

Mr. Morley: Members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on geographical indications and protected designations of origin 6 times within the last 5 years.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 914W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture; and if she will make a statement. [73293]

Mr. Morley: To date, no members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of this Committee.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 248W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Management Committee of the common organisations of agricultural markets for sheep and goats; and if she will make a statement. [73176]

Mr. Morley: In the period from September 2001 (the start of the new session) to date, Scottish Executive officials have attended 3 of these meetings.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with regard to the answer of 26 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 913W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Implementation Committee for Spirit Drinks; and if she will make a statement. [73296]

Mr. Morley: The Spirit Drinks Implementation Committee (SDIC) is mandated by Council Regulation 1576/89 and is responsible for the general rules on the definition, description and presentation of spirit drinks as laid down in that Regulation.

UK representation on SDIC meetings is determined according to the agenda items that are proposed for discussion and can include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations. Following consultation with devolved administrations about each SDIC agenda so far, it has been agreed that Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs alone would represent UK interests.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 370W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on certificates of specific character for agricultural products and foodstuffs; and if she will make a statement. [73179]

Mr. Morley: Members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on certificates of specific character once within the last 5 years.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 248W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Management Committee of the common organisations of agricultural markets for beef and veal; and if she will make a statement. [73175]

Mr. Meacher: The UK delegation to the Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress on the EC Nitrates Directive ("the Article 9 committee")

included officials from the Scottish Executive on the 26 October 1999 (12 meeting), 6 December 2001 (15 meeting) and 17 June 2002 (16 meeting).

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Standing Committee for Foodstuffs is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70567]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Standing Committee for Food was replaced by the Standing Committee on Animal Health and the Food Chain (Section: Food Safety and Controls) from 21 February 2002, by virtue of EP/Council Regulation 178/2002. The United Kingdom is represented on this Committee by officials, usually from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with both the FSA and DEFRA on the formulation of European Union policy which touches on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive. Representatives of the Scottish Executive may attend as part of the UK delegation, should the subject matter require this. The Standing Committee is next due to meet on 11/12 September 2002.

[This information is correct as at Friday, 2 August 2002]

Livestock Movements

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library the latest scientific advice that she has received on the justification for the 20-day rule on livestock movements. [70112]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* A paper explaining the veterinary basis for the Interim Movements Regime, including the 20-day standstill, was placed in the Library on 7 February 2002 (Number 02/276 and has also been published on the DEFRA website (www.defra.gov.uk/footandmouth).

This is currently being reviewed following discussions with representatives of the cattle and sheep veterinary societies. We will also take into account the recommendations of the Royal Society and Anderson inquiry reports on this issue. We will shortly publish an updated paper outlining the latest scientific and veterinary advice.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from the Sheep Veterinary Society about the 20-day rule. [71646]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Sheep Veterinary Society have written to DEFRA officials suggesting that the 20-day standstill could be replaced by a 5-day standstill.

Land Disposals

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many parcels of land have been identified by the Forestry Commission for disposal in England; how many have been the subject of agreement offers to the local planning authority to secure continued access to the land; how many have been sold; and how many of those sold were subject to access agreements in each year since 1997. [70042]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* The Forestry Commission has freedom to sell some woodlands due to their relatively small size and location, as part of the continuous process of rationalisation of its estate. This process involves the acquisition of land which will contribute to the Commission's wide-ranging objectives, as well as the sale of certain areas.

In all sales cases, the Forestry Commission notifies the relevant Local Authority when an area of woodland is to be sold. The information concerning Forestry Commission woodland sales and Continued Public Access Agreements (CPA) in England, for each year since 1997, is therefore as follows:

Financial Year	*Number of woodlands identified for sale*	*Number of woodlands sold*	*CPA Offered*	*CPA Accepted*
1997–98	16	52[1]	29	8
1998–99	3	30	13	3
1999–2000	10	11	8	0
2000–01	11	17	5	1
2001–02	8	18	3	0
Total[1]	137	128	58	12

[1]At the start of Financial Year 1997–98, the Forestry Commission had a total of 89 woodlands already identified for sale.

Disposal And Recycling

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received from *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* retailers and *(c)* waste management companies about the impact of the revised European Waste Catalogue and Hazardous Waste list on the UK's disposal and recycling infrastructure. [70610]

Mr. Meacher: We have had informal exchanges with all these stakeholders and are aware of their concerns. We will shortly be consulting on the current review of the UK Special Waste Regulations and will ensure all these groups are fully involved.

GM Crop Trials

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the conclusions were of the GM crop trials in Herefordshire. [71027]

Mr. Meacher: The results of the farm-scale evaluations will be not be published until data from all trial sites has been collated. Results for spring sown crops (maize, beet spring oil seed rape) should be available in summer 2003 and results of winter oil seed rape in 2004.

Chromate Copper Arsenate-treated Wood

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions

she has had with the Secretary of State for Health regarding the safety of CCA pressure treated wood. [69638]

Mr. Meacher: The European Commission has drawn up proposals under the Marketing and Use Directive (76/769/EEC) to prohibit the use of CCA wood preservatives, but with derogations to allow continued use in a number of essential areas where human contact is limited. Draft proposals are currently being considered by Member States and discussions on the content of the proposal have taken place between officials from Department of Health, DTI who represent the views of the construction industry/consumers and HSE who regulate wood preservative products under the Control of Pesticide Regulations (1986).

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received regarding risk assessments of CCA pressure treated wood her Department has performed. [69637]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has not carried out any risk assessment of wood pretreated with copper/chrome/arsenic (CCA) wood preservative.

In the UK wood preservative products are regulated under the Control of Pesticide Regulations (1986) and the Health and Safety Executive lead on such non-agricultural pesticides. CCA is approved for use in products for pressure impregnation at industrial sites. This follows the advice to Ministers from the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) that such products do not present any risk to human health or the environment.

Recently an expert advisory committee to the European Commission the Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment (SCTEE) has reviewed the safety of wood treated with this preservative and has concluded that there may be a risk to health of children from the use of such treated timber in playground equipment and also when treated wood is burnt or disposed.

The European Commission has drawn up proposals under the Marketing and Use Directive to prohibit the use of CCA wood preservatives, but with derogations to allow continued use in a number of essential areas where human contact is limited. Draft proposals are currently being considered by Member States.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department has undertaken to prevent the household burning of arsenic-treated waste wood. [69636]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The Clean Air Act 1993 prohibits the use of unauthorised fuel (such as wood and bituminous coal) in domestic grates in houses located in designated smoke control areas. Some closed domestic stoves are permitted for use in smoke control areas to burn specific types of wood, which are usually specified as firewood or wood or untreated dry wood.

The EU Scientific Committee on Toxicity, Ecotoxicity and the Environment has recently advised that there may be a risk to human health when wood treated with copper/chrome/arsenic (CCA) wood preservative is burnt. The European Commission has therefore drawn up proposals under the Marketing and Use Directive to prohibit the use of CCA wood preservatives, except for a limited number of essential areas where human contact is limited. Draft proposals are currently being considered by Member States and will form the basis of harmonised European Community controls on CCA.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department has received regarding the *(a)* incineration and *(b)* landfill disposal of chromate copper arsenate pressure treated wood and its effects on (i) air and (ii) water pollution levels. [69635]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* I am not aware that the Department has received any representations regarding wood pressure treated with chromate copper arsenate. Any question of the incineration or landfill of these chemicals or any evaluation of the environmental impacts of imported chemicals or pressure treated wood would be a matter for the Environment Agency, who control disposal facilities for hazardous waste.

However, the UK has agreed to take back chromated copper arsenate waste from Djibouti. This waste resulted from a huge leakage at the dockside in Djibouti, and is being taken back on environmental and humanitarian grounds, as Djibouti does not have facilities to dispose of such waste.

EU Directive on Environmental Liability

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* British business and *(b)* the public sector of the draft EU Directive on environmental liability. [70841]

Margaret Beckett: The draft Directive was adopted by the Commission in January 2002 and DEFRA launched a public consultation on the proposals on April 12. Extensive study has been carried out throughout this period to assess the impact of the draft Directive. Through direct consultation with a selection of stakeholders, and using the responses received to the public consultation, DEFRA recently produced an extended partial Regulatory Impact Assessment (COM (02) 17) which considers the potential benefits and costs of the draft Directive.

The assessment indicates that much of the environmental damage that would fall within the scope of the proposed regime is already subject to existing domestic legislation. It does suggest however, that the proposed Directive could have additional positive environmental benefits, by requiring higher standards of remediation and by encouraging operators to take additional precaution. Businesses could face additional costs through, amongst other things, possible financial security requirements, and additional expenditure on precautionary measures. Additional study is being carried out in this area in order to quantify such costs.

In requiring higher standards of remediation, the responsibilities of the Competent Authority, which is designated by the Member State to require operators to take preventative or restorative measures, would be increased. Under the Commission's proposal, the Competent Authority would have a duty to take action to remedy damage if the liable party could not be found. A

preliminary assessment provided by selected enforcement agencies indicates that the Directive would largely constitute an extension of existing responsibilities although there would be some new duties. Therefore there may be some resource implications.

The Government supports a regime which is equitable, proportionate, clear, insurable, easy to implement, does not damage business competitiveness, and delivers clear environmental benefits. Consequently, assessment of the potential impact of the draft Directive is ongoing to inform the UK position in the negotiations.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the draft EU Directive on environmental liability. [70840]

Margaret Beckett: The purpose of the proposed Directive is to establish a framework for the prevention and remediation of environmental damage in accordance with the principle that the polluter pays. This represents an important and significant development in EC environmental law. The Government has therefore conducted a public consultation on the proposals, and the UK position on the detail of the proposal will be finalised in the light of the comments received.

In broad terms, the Government supports a regime which is equitable, proportionate, clear, insurable, easy to implement, does not damage business competitiveness, and delivers clear environmental benefits.

The partial regulatory impact assessment submitted to Parliament (COM (02) 17), indicates that much of the environmental damage covered by the Directive is already the subject of existing domestic regimes, but the proposals go further in some respects. The Directive would set higher standards of remediation and introduce the concepts of equivalent compensation and interim losses. Further benefits would arise from introducing a regime across the European Community which would harmonise the rules and standards for environmental liability across member states. Provided that the right balance between costs and benefits is achieved, this proposal could therefore play a useful part in safeguarding the environment.

Technetium-99 Leakage

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what representations her Department has received regarding *(a)* leakage levels of technetium-99 into groundwater at Sellafield and *(b)* the point source origin of such leakage; [69633]

(2) what representations her Department has received regarding the effect on the food chain of technetium-99 leakage into groundwater. [69634]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* My Department has not received any representations on these issues.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessement she has made of the possible environmental policy gains that would arise from the implementation of the draft EU Directive on environmental liability. [70834]

Margaret Beckett: The extended partial Regulatory Impact Assessment, submitted to Parliament (COM (02) 17) considers the potential gains that would arise from implementation of the draft Directive. It concludes that much of the environmental damage covered within the scope of the proposed Directive is already subject to a number of domestic regimes.

However, the assessment does establish that there could potentially be positive environmental benefits, resulting in particular from the setting of higher standards of remediation that would require more extensive remediative action. Furthermore, the introduction of equivalent remediation, which would require restorative action to be carried out at an alternative site, and the concept of compensation for interim losses would go further than existing legislation.

Additional benefits could result from an increase in preventative action by those carrying out potentially damaging activities. Consequently, less environmental damage may occur.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of responses to the Government's public consultation on the draft EU Directive on environmental liability. [70837]

Margaret Beckett: The public consultation on proposals for a Directive on environmental liability ended on 24 May 2002 and a study has been undertaken of all of the responses received. The responses helped to inform the UK position at the June Environment Council and the extended partial Regulatory Impact Assessment.

Copies of all responses to the Government's public consultation have been placed in the DEFRA library.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the Council of Ministers next to debate the draft EU Directive on Environmental Liability [70842]

Margaret Beckett: We expect the Council to discuss the draft Directive on environmental liability in October. The indications are that if this occurs, discussion will centre on a progress report.

Sewage

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on recycling sewage sludge on land as an environmentally sustainable option; when the revised regulations will be available for consultation; and if she will make a statement. [71304]

Mr. Meacher: As stated in its Waste Strategy 2000, the Government considers that recovering value from sewage sludge through spreading on agricultural land is the best practicable environmental option in most circumstances. Agricultural use of sludge brings savings of several million pounds in fertiliser costs and the organic matter improves soil structure, its workability and water holding capacity.

The Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations 1989 (SI 1263) as amended in 1990 (SI 880), impose controls on the application of sludge to agricultural land to prevent the accumulation of heavy metals in the soil and to

prevent bacteriological contamination of crops. These controls are supplemented by a non-statutory Code of Practice and the "Safe Sludge Matrix" a voluntary agreement drawn up in 1998 by Water UK (representing the water companies) and the British Retail Consortium.

The Government welcomes the development of the Matrix and has indicated that it will reflect the tighter standards it contains in revised regulations. We plan to issue a consultation document seeking views on the proposed revisions in the very near future.

French Beef Ban

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to other member states of the European Union since the refusal of the French Government to lift the ban on the import of UK beef within the 15 day period set down by the European Court. [70632]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* None.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she plans to have with French representatives concerning the export of beef from the UK to France. [72440]

Mr. Morley: The Secretary of State regularly raises the French Government's illegal ban on British beef with her French counterpart and will continue to do so until the ban is lifted.

Parrett Catchment Project

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidelines have been issued to the Parrett catchment project by the Government; and what its remit is. [71365]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett Catchment project is a local partnership and as such is not subject to Government guidelines. We have welcomed the initiative and continue to encourage the project to analyse proposed options further and to integrate with existing government sponsored initiatives such as the Catchment Flood Management Plan.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she has taken to ensure civic amenity sites will be able to continue accepting end-of-life electrical products if they are reclassified as hazardous waste. [71359]

Mr. Meacher: The Spending Review announced on 15 July that additional money would be available to local authorities via the EPCS block in future years. This will enable local authorities to make any modifications to the licence for a civic amenity site that may be necessary. We are aware that local authorities have some concerns about the implementation domestically of the European Waste Catalogue and we are looking at ways of minimising any impact.

Area-based Initiatives

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list for each area-based initiative for which her Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71456]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the Answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie) on 24 July, *Official Report,* column 1206W.

Exmoor

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she will take under the CAP reforms to ensure Exmoor gets grant aid for environmental projects. [71236]

Mr. Morley: The European Commission's proposals for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy include ideas for the progressive transfer of resources away from production subsidies towards wider social and economic objectives. The proposals will be subject to negotiations in the Council of Ministers.

The Government supports the general direction of the reform proposals, but it is too early to say what the outcome will be in terms of extra grant aid for environmental projects. Exmoor is already designated as an Environmentally Sensitive Area, and is eligible for grants under the ESA scheme which are only available in the 10 per cent. of England that is so designated.

Hydrofluorocarbons

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 717W, what conclusions have been reached by the Sustainable Procurement Group on enabling Government departments to work more closely with their suppliers with the intention of notifying suppliers more effectively of the Government's view of hydrofluorocarbons as a non-sustainable technology. [71451]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State has established a high level inter-departmental Sustainable Procurement Group to look at how sustainable development can be more fully embedded into central-government procurement. One angle is that we are trying to ensure that procurement practitioners comply fully with Government policy and ensure that Government procurement properly supports sustainable development. That would include Government policy on HCFC/HFC free products wherever possible.

HFCs are not sustainable in the long term—the Government believes that continued technological developments will mean that HFCs may eventually be able to be replaced in the applications where they are used.

Guidance to Departments is provided in the action sheets on "Climate Change" and "Ozone Depleting Substances" in the Green Guide for Buyers, available on www.sustainable-development.gov.uk. This is:

1. No purchase of products or equipment containing ozone depleting substances such as hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), halons, carbon tetrachloride, 111 trichloroethane and bromochloromethane, which are banned or being phased out under EC Regulation.

2. Products should be free of gaseous and non-gaseous substances that contribute to climate change where it is safe, cost-effective and technically feasible to do so. Substances with a high global warming potential which should be avoided wherever practicable include HFCs—used in refrigerants and fire extinguishing systems.

Recycling

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason glass, ceramics and metals, recovered after thermal and other industrial processing, cannot be included in recycling targets under the Audit Commission's best-value definition. [71176]

Mr. Meacher: The Government encourages material recovery in all its forms. However in line with the waste hierarchy set out in the Waste Framework Directive and Waste Strategy 2000, the Government particularly wants to see a major increase in the primary recycling and composting of household waste rather than in landfill or incineration. The Government has therefore set local authorities statutory targets for the recycling and composting of household waste that exclude residues from incineration.

Bottlenosed Dolphin

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the future of the bottle-nosed dolphin in British waters. [71716]

Mr. Meacher: Bottlenose dolphins are protected in the Great Britain under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Section 9 of the 1981 Act makes it an offence to intentionally kill or injure this species. In England and Wales this protection was strengthened by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 that introduced a new offence of intentional or reckless disturbance.

The bottlenose dolphin is also listed under Annex II of the Council Directive (92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora. This requires the designation of protected areas for bottlenose dolphins. Three such areas have been designated as candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) for their local bottlenose dolphin populations. Cardigan Bay and the Lleyn Peninsula and the Sarnau in Wales and the Moray Firth in Scotland.

As part of the UK's biodiversity strategy, the Government has developed action plans for the conservation of certain species and habitats. Small dolphins, which include bottlenose dolphins, have such a plan. This aims to maintain the dolphins' current range and abundance and, in the longer term, to increase the ranges of small dolphin populations where appropriate. The plan's objectives include minimising the incidental capture of dolphins in fishing nets, reducing acoustic disturbance and improving coastal water quality by reducing pollution. A co-ordinated steering group has been set up to take forward cetacean action plans and comprises representatives from non-government organisations, such as the RSPCA, the government, fishermen and other stakeholders.

Business Diversification

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what level of support her Department has given initiatives aimed at encouraging new business diversification in each of the past five years. [71665]

Alun Michael: DEFRA provides grants for farmers in England seeking to pursue good diversification projects under the Rural Enterprise Scheme. The scheme was launched in October 2000 as part of the England Rural Development Programme. Grant expenditure on diversification projects amounted to £5.3 million in 2001. The level of activity in 2001 was affected by the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak and is expected to rise to about £7.5 million in 2002.

Support for diversification in earlier years was provided via the Objective 5b Scheme, now closed, which was targeted on six disadvantaged rural areas in England. The scheme encompassed support for a range of measures and disaggregated figures for diversification projects are not available. Total scheme expenditure for the past five years is shown in the following table.

Year	*Objective 5b expenditure (£ million)*
1997	5.7
1998	12.5
1999	15.7
2000	21.7
2001	28.8

In addition, the Farm Business Advice Service was launched in October 2000 to provide farm businesses with a business health check and identify possible future business options, including whether or not to diversify. Expenditure under this initiative amounted to £0.7 million in 2000 and £6.25 million in 2001. From September 2001 the Department has also offered assistance in the form of free planning consultancy advice to farmers who intend to pursue an eligible diversification project through the Rural Enterprise Scheme.

National Air Quality Strategy

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the target date for achievement of compliance with the National Air Quality Strategy objective is. [71616]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The objectives and compliance dates are set out in the following table.

Air quality objectives for protection of human health

Pollutant *Objective** *Concentration* *Date to be measured as achieved by*
Benzene 16.25 μg/m³ (5ppb) running annual mean 31 December 2003
1,3-butadiene 2.25 μg/m³ (1ppb)

running annual mean
31 December 2003

Carbon monoxide
11.6mg/m³ (10ppm)
running 8 hour mean
31 December 2003

Lead
0.5 µg/m³
annual mean
31 December 2004

0.25 µg/m³
annual mean
31 December 2008

Nitrogen dioxide
200 µg/m³(105ppb)
1 hour mean
31 December 2005

not to be exceeded more than 18 times a year

40 µg/m³(21ppb)
annual mean
31 December 2005

Particles (PM_{10})
50 µg/m³ not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year
24 hour mean
31 December 2004

40 µg/m³
annual mean
31 December 2004

Sulphur dioxide
350 µg/m³(132ppb)
1 hour mean
31 December 2004

not to be exceeded more than 24 times a year

125 µg/m³ (47ppb) not to be exceeded more than 3 times a year
24 hour mean
31 December 2004

266 µg/m³ (100ppb)
15 minute mean
31 December 2005

not to be exceeded more than 35 times a year

Ozone
100 µg/m³ (50ppb) not to be exceeded more than 10 times a year
daily maximum of running 8 hour mean
31 December 2005

Objectives for the protection of vegetation and ecosytems
Nitrogen oxides
30 µg/m³ (16ppb)
annual mean
31 December 2000

Sulphur dioxide
20 µg/m³ (8ppb)
annual mean
31 December 2000

20µg/m³(8ppb)
winter average (1 October to 31 March)
31 December 2000

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*µg/m³: micrograms per cubic metre
mg/m³: milligrames per cubic metre
ppb/ppm: parts per billion/million

Further details of these objectives, together with modelled forecasts for each pollutant, are set out in the January 2000 Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The document can be viewed on the DEFRA website at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/airquality/index.htm.

Overcharging

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Mathew) of 12 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 1233W, on overcharging, how many cases are being pursued for overcharging; and if she will initiate an investigation following the settlement of accounts to determine the *(a)* scale and *(b)* implications of this aspect of the foot and mouth clean-up. [71347]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Pursuant to the answer I gave to the honourable Member for Carlisle of 12 July, I refer my Hon. Friend to Figure 60 in Chapter 4 of the recent NAO Report *The 2001 Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease* published on 18 June 2002. The Report is available on the NAO's website on http://www.nao.gov.uk/publications/naoreports/01-02/0102939.pdf. Information other than that provided in the NAO report cannot be provided at this time for reasons of legal and commercial confidentiality.

A value for money study and a commercial lessons learned report are being prepared though they cannot be finalised until the forensic examination of the accounts of contractors is completed. The findings and recommendations of the study and report will be shared with the National Audit Office and the Office of Government Commerce. It is the Department's intention to publish these findings and recommendations on the Departmental website subject only to unavoidable obligations in respect of legal and commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to apply different standstill rules for movements of different species of livestock. [71644]

Margaret Beckett: We wish to consider—and discuss with stakeholders—the relevant recommendations of the Royal Society and Lessons Learned Inquiries before making any decisions about the future of the 20-day standstill.

Fox Population

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received concerning problems created by the urban fox population; and if she will make a statement. [71107]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* We have received a small number of representations concerning problems arising from the presence of urban foxes. The Department recognises that foxes can cause problems in urban areas and publishes advice to householders on managing fox problems. Responsibility for the control of foxes rests with those people who most benefit from such control, that is, individual property owners and occupiers, who may engage private pest control contractors to undertake this work. There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to control foxes in their areas.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her latest estimate is of the total fox population of the United Kingdom, by region; and what the figures were in each of the past five years. [71114]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The latest estimate of the fox population in the United Kingdom is taken from a CSL report published in 1997. In 1995 the total pre-breeding fox population in Britain was estimated to be 240,000, comprising:

	Number
England	195,000
Scotland	23,000
Wales	22,000

No more recent figures are available.

Urban Foxes

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's policy is with regard to the problem of urban foxes, with particular reference to the Borough of Oadby and Wigston, Leicestershire; and if she will make a statement. [73408]

Mr. Meacher: The Department recognises that foxes can cause problems in urban areas and publishes advice to householders on managing fox problems. Responsibility for the control of foxes rests with those people who most benefit from such control, that is, individual property owners and occupiers, who may engage private pest control contractors to undertake this work. There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to control foxes in their areas.

We have received no recent representations from the Borough of Oadby and Wigston, Leicestershire, about urban foxes.

Milk Marketing

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are undertaking to improve the marketing of milk. [71761]

Mr. Morley: The marketing of food products is a commercial matter for the companies concerned. But we have extended the remit of the Milk Development Council to allow it to undertake generic promotional activities, funded by levy payers.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what figures she collates on the level of the urban fox population; and what the population was in each of the past five years. [71115]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Department does not routinely collate data on the levels of urban fox populations, but commissions research into the subject from time to time. A report issued in 1997 estimated the UK urban fox population at 33,000. In a survey of 139 councils conducted in 2001, most expressed the opinion that the urban fox population density in their area had risen.

The Department holds no figures on the levels of urban fox populations for each of the past five years.

Rural Economy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many new enterprises her Department has stimulated in the rural economy in each of the past five years. [71664]

Alun Michael: The former Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme was closed to new applicants in 1996, while payments under both the new strands of expenditure under the England Rural Development Programme started in 2001. The following table shows projects supported by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its predecessors in each of the past five years under these Schemes to assist the establishment of new rural businesses or new business developments in existing rural enterprises.

Year	*Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme (pre-ERDP)**	*ERDP Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme*	*ERDP Rural Enterprise Scheme*	*Total*
1997	28	-	-	28
1998	21	-	-	21
1999	22	-	-	22
2000	4	0	0	4
2001	Closed	27	198	225

* Closed to new applicants in England in 1996. The figures shown reflect final payments made to successful projects in each of the relevant years.
Current indications are that the number of businesses helped under RES and PMG will be significantly higher this year, at around double last year's figures, as applications increase from the foot and mouth affected levels of 2001.

Assistance is also available to rural businesses under other grant schemes but it would not be possible to identify the number of new or expanding businesses resulting from such assistance except at disproportionate cost.

In addition Regional Development Agencies are required to support the creation of new businesses in both rural and non-rural areas using DEFRA as well as other Departments' funding contributions. Information on the number of businesses stimulated is, however, unavailable.

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if her Department has responsibility for the implementation of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive into UK law; [72033]

(3) who has represented the UK at the EU Council of Ministers during discussions of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive; [72041]

(4) who will represent the UK on the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive in the forthcoming EU conciliation meetings. [72034]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State and I represent the UK at the EU Environment Council of Ministers during discussions on the WEEE Directive.

Officials from the UK Permanent Representation to the European Union, led by the UK Deputy Permanent Representative, will represent the UK in the forthcoming EU conciliation committee meetings on the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive.

A decision is yet to be made as to whether DTI or my department will have responsibility for transposing the WEEE Directive into UK law.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that consumers do not pay twice for the recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment. [72042]

Mr. Meacher: The proposed EC Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment is a Producer Responsibility directive which requires producers to provide for the financing of the collection, treatment, recovery and environmentally sound disposal of WEEE from private households deposited at collection facilities, onwards.

The Common Position text of the draft Directive—which is still under negotiation and subject to change—stipulates that consumers must be able to return items of WEEE free of charge. The text does not, however, outline the methods by which producers are to provide for the above financing. Without a final text, it is not possible to provide details of how the Directive will be implemented in the UK.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what mechanisms she is putting into place to prevent companies avoiding their responsibilities for recycling under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [72040]

Mr. Meacher: The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive is still under negotiation and without a final text it is too early to outline details of how the Directive will be implemented in the UK.

Throughout negotiation of the Directive, the Government has kept industry informed of their likely responsibilities under the Directive and we have reported back on developments in the negotiations in Brussels as they happen.

The Government will be working with the Environment Agency to ensure that the appropriate penalties are in place for use in cases of non-compliance, as required under the Directive.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what she has done to ensure that the views of *(a)* environmental and consumer organisations and *(b)* electronics companies are taken into account in the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. [72038]

Mr. Meacher: The Department and the DTI are in regular contact with industry, including environmental and consumer organizations and electronics companies, about the proposed Directive and its implementation in the UK.

In particular–

formal DTI consultation was issued in summer 2000. The results were published by the DTI in December 2000;

DTI and DEFRA officials have presented on WEEE at conferences and seminars totalling 23 times in past 6 months;

The DTI host a series of meetings with retailers focusing on the retailer requirements in the Directive and similar focus groups are planned on permitting and for manufacturers by sector;

DEFRA and the DTI are working together with the Small Business Service to organise twenty events in England to raise awareness of the requirements of the Directive and discuss potential implementation methods. Representatives from all stakeholder groups will be invited to put forward their views. Similar events in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are being planned with the Devolved Administrations.

The Government takes into account the views of industry when drawing up our negotiation lines and will continue to do so throughout implementation in the UK.

Faith Communities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list projects involving faith communities which are supported by her Department. [71845]

Mr. Morley: The Department is not currently involved in any faith-based projects and does not provide financial support to any faith communities.

Noise Complaints

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what proportion of noise complaints were caused by acoustic or non-amplified music being played in pubs, bars or nightclubs in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002; and if she will make a statement. [71675]

Mr. Meacher: Data on UK noise complaints are not collected specifically for acoustics or non-amplified music being played in pubs, bars or nightclubs. However, figures are available for the number of noise complaints resulting from commercial and leisure activities that were reported to Environmental Health Officers in England and Wales. This category includes pubs, bars, nightclubs, food premises, retail stores and sporting pursuits.

Year	*Commercial and Leisure Noise Complaints per million population*	*Noise Complaints (all categories) per million population*	*Commercial and Leisure Noise Complaints as % of Total*
2000–01	1,038	7,081	14.7
1999–2000	960	7,091	13.5
1998–99	836	6,111	13.7

Source:

CIEH 1999, 2000, 2001

The corresponding figures for 2001–02 are expected to be available later this year.

Modulation

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will hold discussions with the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors on its study on The Impact of Modulation; and if she will make a statement. [71269]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* I have received a number of representations on modulation policy, in particular following the Policy Commission's recommendation to increase the modulation rate in England from 2004. The varied positions taken include concern about the possible impact on farm incomes and support for the positive effect on rural development funding.

A decision on whether or not to adjust modulation rates has yet to be taken, but will be informed by the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). It will also take account of negotiations on the CAP Mid-Term Reviews.

I have no plans to hold discussions with RICS on this issue. However, other DEFRA ministers have met with officials from RICS recently.

Committee Mandates

Mr. John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the mandate of the Standing Committee on agricultural statistics is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increaseits accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58438]

Mr. Morley: The Standing Committee on Agricultural Statistics was set up by a Council Decision (72/279/EEC) on 31 July 1972. It makes detailed decisions on implementing EU legislation as set out in each case using the delegated authority provided by the EU "Comitology" process.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

The Standing Committee on Agricultural Statistics includes representatives from all member states and is chaired by the Commission. Separate meetings are set up for each subject normally linked to the appropriate working group or meeting of officials. The appropriate statisticians from the UK departments attend.

There have been 2 Standing Committee meetings this year. The forthcoming items for decision will include the definition and deadlines for statistics in the forthcoming 2005 EU Structure Survey; the development initiatives on the "Improving Community Agricultural Statistics Programme"; the 2003 survey of ground points across the EU and the rules of procedure of the Standing Committee.

The work on Agricultural Statistics is subject to the Direction of the European Parliament, Council, the Statistical Programme Committee meeting of heads of each National Statistical Services and the Agricultural Statistics Committee Meeting.

It is not possible to separately identify the specific annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds without incurring disproportionate costs.

New or significant changes to EU legislation are already subject to Parliamentary Scrutiny. We provide information on agricultural statistics work in National Statistics reports and plans, which are published, on the Internet.

Energy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what powers she has to impose Agenda 21, community renewable energy, and alternative energy strategies on local authorities; and what penalties may be exacted from local authorities which fail to produce such strategies in comformity with her guidance; [72046]

(2) what requirements are placed on *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* energy providers with regard to Agenda 21, community renewable energy, and alternative energy strategies. [72047]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Part I of the Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on English local authorities to prepare a community strategy. The delivery of improved long term economic, social and environmental quality of life, contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the UK, lies at the heart of community strategies; indeed community strategies are required, by law, to promote sustainable development. The Government believes community strategies will promote the mainstreaming of sustainable development across local authorities' functions. Where they have effective and holistic Local Agenda 21 strategies, there may be good reasons for local authorities to continue to implement LA21. However, the Government feels that, in the long term, LA21 strategies will effectively be subsumed by community strategies. Whilst there are no requirements placed on local authorities to produce specific community renewable energy or alternative energy strategies, energy use, as an important element of sustainable development, can be considered as part of the community strategy process.

For energy providers, the Renewables Obligation under the Utilities Act 2000 requires all licensed electricity suppliers in Great Britain to supply a specified and growing proportion of their supplies from renewable energy in order to meet the Government's target that 10 per cent. of electricity sales will come from renewable sources by 2010.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she plans to take to encourage *(a)* the sheep farming industry to

replace live animal exports with the export of meat and carcasses, *(b)* the public to purchase domestically produced rather than imported lamb and *(c)* retailers to market UK-produced light lambs while paying a price to farmers which properly reflects the production costs. [72443]

Mr. Morley: Through its Industry Forum Adaptation Scheme, the Government is helping to fund work being undertaken by the Red Meat Industry Forum to improve the competitiveness of the red meat industry. Over the three financial years ending in 2005, a contribution of £1.52 million has been committed to match industry funding of £1.7 million on benchmarking, analysis of the supply chain and masterclasses. The Forum is also pursuing other initiatives in its ten point action plan, which was launched in March this year. Work of the Forum is being led by the Meat and Livestock Commission, which as part of its remit undertakes promotional support for the benefit of sheep producers. Many marketing issues, including the export of sheep for slaughter, involve commercial decisions in which the Government only has a limited role. In encouraging change the Government welcomes the work of the Forum and other industry initiatives to build partnership and trust in the supply chain.

Climate Change

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regional climate change scenarios have been modelled by her Department in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [70533]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* In April 2002, the Department launched the 2002 UK Climate Change Scenarios. The Department funded the development of these scenarios to support the UK Climate Impacts Programme, the purpose of which is to help public and private sector organisations assess the impact of climate change on their sectors and plan ways of adapting to its consequences. The new scenarios were produced using a regional climate change model and represent a significant step forward in our understanding of possible consequences of climate change for different parts of the UK. They replace an earlier set of scenarios funded by the Department and published in 1998.

The Department is also funding the application of regional climate change models in developing countries to improve our collective understanding of the effects of climate change, for example through projects with India, China and South Africa.

Additionally, we currently fund (with the Department for International Development) work at the Hadley Centre on a portable Regional Climate Change Model (PRECIS) which will enable developing countries to carry out their own assessments of how climate change will affect them.

Information Campaigns

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department spent on information literature, advertising and campaign material in financial year 2001–02; if she will list the campaigns that spent over £250,000; and if she will make a statement. [70204]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* DEFRA was established during the 1st quarter of financial year 2001–02. The Department's centralised publicity expenditure is not recorded in the format requested. Our records show a total expenditure for publicity of £6,640,161.00 as at 31 March 2002.

Due to the effects of the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak last year, customary publicity and exhibitions activities were deferred or cancelled. DEFRA centralised publicity activities focused on poster campaigns, events, shows and direct information literature mailings.

The "Your Countryside You're Welcome" campaign was the only one for which expenditure exceeded £250,000.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in her Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72250]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend (the Prime Minister), on 24 July, *Official Report*, column 1373W.

Rare Wildlife Trade

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what penalties are available for someone caught dealing in the rare wildlife trade; and what plans she has to increase penalties. [72529]

Mr. Meacher: People found guilty of trading in wildlife specimens protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 can be fined up to £5,000 and/or imprisoned for up to six months. These higher penalties were introduced by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and there are no plans to increase them further.

Offences under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 (COTES) are currently punishable by a fine of up to £5,000 and/or up to three months imprisonment if tried in a Magistrates' Court, and an unlimited fine and/or up to two years imprisonment at Crown Court. These penalties are being considered as part of the current review of the COTES Regulations.

Endangered Species

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made with the review on legislation covering the trafficking of endangered species. [72702]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* A pre-consultation paper outlining the Government's initial proposals for the review of the Control of Trade in

Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 was sent to all the main stakeholder organisations on 18 July. We have asked for comments by 30 August 2002.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many types of animals in the UK are on the endangered species list; and what measures she is taking to increase their numbers. [72530]

Mr. Meacher: My scientific advisors on wildlife issues, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, have advised that there are approximately 1785 invetebrate, two amphibian, two reptile, six bird and one mammal species which are endangered. In 1995 the UK Biodiversity Action Plan was published and more recently a significant number of specific Action Plans have been finalised. These are targeted at the conservation needs of rare species and habitats and are being implemented through broad partnerships of government, statutory conservation agencies and the voluntary sector. The Biodiversity Action Plans encourage positive actions for rare species at a range of scales, from national to local, and by a range of organisations. Monitoring will provide feedback on the efficacy of the implementation of the plans.

Hendon Sewage Treatment Works

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in publishing the inspectors report on the Hendon Sewage Treatment works; and when she expects to publish it. [72308]

Mr. Meacher: The Inspector's report following the inquiry on the Hendon Sewage Treatment Works (and the Whitburn Storm Sewage Pumping Station) is a comprehensive document containing a large amount of data of both a technical and general nature. Full and detailed consideration has inevitably taken some time, but I expect the Secretary of State's decision to be published together with the Inspector's report very shortly.

Light Pollution

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to introduce anti-light-pollution legislation; and if she will make a statement. [72095]

Mr. Meacher: Light is excluded from the statutory nuisance regime of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. During the debate of the associated bill in the House of Lords, floodlighting as a statutory nuisance was rejected on the basis of the low incidence of reported problems, and the perceived looseness of the proposed term "floodlighting". However I recognise that intrusion from security lighting has become a growing problem, and in view of this I will consider what measures may be used to address this issue.

Currently where there is a proposal for which a planning application is required, the local planning authority has the power to control many sorts of lighting installation by imposing planning conditions. In this situation, the authority can refuse permission, or grant permission with conditions which could specify in detail what sort of external light installations would be allowed. In any other circumstances, since the courts have ruled that emitting light does not of itself constitute development, the matter is outside planning controls.

I understand that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to amend planning legislation in this area. Instead, this Government continues to publicise and to recommend the advice given in "*Lighting in the Countryside: Towards good practice*", which is available on our website at: http://www.planning.odpm.gov.uk/litc/index.htm This publication, which is also relevant to those in towns and cities, indicates a way forward which we believe is preferable to further regulation.

Waste Collection

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to charge individual households for waste collection; and if she will make a statement. [72223]

Mr. Meacher: The Performance and Innovation Unit, now the Strategy Unit, are conducting a wide ranging review of waste strategy which is due to report in the autumn. Variable household charging is an issue which falls within the scope of that work and PIU have invited views on the issue on its website. DEFRA Ministers and the Government as a whole are keen for the review to consider all the possible options for delivering Government objectives on waste.

Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the final agenda is for the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development. [72449]

Mr. Meacher: The Agenda is not yet fully agreed. We strongly support the priority areas of poverty eradication and the sectoral themes of water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity identified by the UN Secretary-General. The developed world must also take concrete steps towards sustainable development by actions to improve our own use of resources. We are also committed to sustainable development in developing countries as witnessed by the increasing proportion of the UK's gross national income devoted to international aid, which will rise to 0.4 per cent. by 2005–06, and through taking forward the important commitments to fair trade, better market access and phasing out of agricultural subsidies and reduction of trade-distorting domestic support as made at Doha.

Rare Wildlife Trade

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are in place to ensure that rare wildlife in the UK is protected. [72528]

Mr. Meacher: The UK has a broad framework of measures to ensure that rare wildlife in the UK is protected. This includes legislative protection for certain species, where such protection is necessary to address the causes of population decline, as well as a range of wider environmental policies. Of particular importance is the UK's national response to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan was

published in 1995 and more recently a significant number of specific Action Plans have been finalised, including 436 biodiversity, 391 species and 45 habitat related action plans. These are targeted at the conservation needs of rare species and of habitats and are being implemented through broad partnerships of government, statutory conservation agencies and the voluntary sector. The Biodiversity Action Plans encourage positive actions for rare species at a range of scales, from national to local, and by a range of organisations. Monitoring will provide feedback on the efficacy of the implementation of the plans.

CAP Reform

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent consultations she has had with organisations representing Scottish farmers regarding CAP reform. [72438]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA has put in place mechanisms to consult a wide range of UK and English bodies on the Commission's Communication on the Mid-Term Review of the CAP. Consulting the industry in Scotland is a matter for the Scottish Executive, with whom DEFRA has ongoing discussions on the Mid-Term Review.

Overseas Contracts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what contracts her Department has recently awarded to *(a)* TNO (Netherlands), *(b)* IAV (Germany), *(c)* AVL (Austria), *(d)* FEV (Germany) and *(e)* IKA (Germany). [72197]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* No contracts have recently been awarded by my Department to any of *(a)* TNO (Netherlands), *(b)* IAV (Germany), *(c)* AVL (Austria), *(d)* FEV (Germany) and *(e)* IKA (Germany).

Composting

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many in vessel composting sites are licensed in the UK. [72812]

Mr. Meacher: In vessel composting is not at present a term that is defined in statute and so records do not separately identify whether composting sites could or could not be termed as in vessel operations. Environment Agency records indicate that there are 68 licensed composting sites and some 630 smaller sites registered as exempt.

Brownfield Sites

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the regional targets are for local authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber for the construction of new dwellings on brownfield land; and what progress the local authorities are making towards these targets. [72815]

Mr. Tony McNulty: RPG12 published in October 2001 sets a brownfield target for housing development of 60 per cent. for the Yorkshire and Humber region as a whole. RPG12 also sets out provisional brownfield targets for strategic planning areas and requires local planning authorities to review these in the course of preparing their development plans following detailed studies into brownfield opportunities. The provisional targets are highest for urban areas such as Sheffield (80 per cent.) and Leeds (66 per cent.) and lower for more rural areas such as North Yorkshire (53 per cent.).

Statistics published in June by the Government showed that in 2000, 57 per cent. of houses built in Yorkshire and the Humber were on brownfield sites. Up to date Information is not currently available for all local authority area in the region. Information supplied by individual local authorties to the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly shows that Sheffield (82 per cent.) and Leeds (74 per cent.) both exceeded their provisional targets in 2001. In North Yorkshire, Harrogate achieved 69 per cent. whilst the more rural district of Richmondshire achieved 32 per cent.

EU Environmental Liability Directive

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for a public fund to help public authorities deal with the remedying of damage on orphan sites under the EU Environmental Liability Directive. [72492]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Under the draft Directive, where the party responsible for environmental damage cannot be found, or has insufficient means to pay the costs of remediation, the responsibility for remediative action would fall to the Competent Authority.

The Government's public consultation on the Commission's proposal, which ended on 24 May 2002, covered the provisions relating to orphan sites. Careful consideration is being given to its detailed implications for the UK and no decisions have yet been taken.

Hydrogen Fuel Cell Technology

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding her Department is providing for development of hydrogen fuel cell technology. [72199]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 July 2002, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Wilson), *Official Report,* column 950–951W.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the time horizons for the likely impact of hydrogen fuel cell technology on road vehicles. [72198]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 July 2002, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Wilson), *Official Report,* column 950–951W.

Overseas Contracts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's policy is on providing collaboration funding for development of fuel reduction technology with British companies; and whether it is the policy of her Department to seek tenders for other European companies before awarding such funding. [72316]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 July 2002, by my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Wilson), *Official Report,* column 950–951W.

Public Awareness

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 381W, if she will place copies of the surveys of public awareness and attitudes in the Library. [72829]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* I have arranged for a paper to be placed in the Library of the House, outlining the development of the "Are You Doing Your Bit?" campaign and including evaluations of its effects on public awareness.

Leakage Targets

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many water undertakings have achieved the leakage targets set by the Deputy Prime Minister in 1997. [72868]

Mr. Meacher: Following the Water Summit in 1997, Ofwat has set each water company an annual leakage target to progressively reduce leakage to its economic level by 2003. This is defined as the level at which the costs to make further reductions in leakage are greater than the costs of supplying additional water from its sources. On 25 July, Ofwat published details of company performance against their targets for 2001–02. Of the twenty-one companies set targets, nineteen met them and are now at or on course to reach their Economic Level of Leakage by 2003. Ofwat considers that the two that did not will recover their positions by 2002–03. Thames Water was subject to special measures rather than being set a volumetric target in 2001–02, due to its unsatisfactory performance in managing leakage. The company's performance in this respect continues to be deficient. Ofwat is taking a number of increased measures to ensure that Thames Water brings its leakage under control by 2003–04, including the setting of local leakage targets for 2002–03.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report,* column 607W, when members of the Scottish Executive have attended meetings of the EU Committee on agricultural structures and rural development; and if she will make a statement. [73167]

Alun Michael: Devolved Administrations attend meetings of the EU Committee on agricultural structures and rural development where they consider the agenda to contain items of sufficient interest. Scottish Executive representatives attended in December to hear of the Commission's revised reporting requirements, in February when its annual modification to the Scottish Rural Development Programme was considered, and in July to look at proposed simplification of the Rural Development Regulation.

Our approach is one of teamwork in which we seek to ensure that there is an agreed UK line on issues covered by the Commission committees, taking into account devolved administration views in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations. In particular, where the rural development programmes of the Scottish Executive or the other devolved administrations are being dealt with by the Committee, we would normally expect representatives from the relevant administration to speak on behalf of the UK.

Badger Testing

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps will be taken to compensate land owners for damage done by unidentified people in connection with field trials involving badger testing. [73358]

Mr. Morley: As part of its voluntary agreement with farmers participating in the randomised badger culling trial, DEFRA has a signed commitment to pay reasonable compensation for damage to crops and property directly caused by operations carried out, and measures taken under the agreement. Claims arising out of damage caused by third parties are considered on a case by case basis and any payment is made on an ex-gratia basis.

In practice the principal target of anti-trial protest has been Departmental property, including traps and vehicles, and field staff. Police support for trial operations is extensive and acts as a deterrent against damage to landowners' property.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what precautions badger field trials testers are taking to avoid being followed on to test sites. [73359]

Mr. Morley: All field staff receive instruction on procedures designed to reduce the personal risk associated with carrying out work on the badger culling field trial. This covers the risk of being followed by field trial protestors to field locations, to the office or to their homes.

"Philomena"

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she intends to have with her French counterpart over the recent attack on the British boat "Philomena," carried out in international waters by French fishermen; and if she will make a statement. [73401]

Mr. Morley: Following the incident within French fishery limits involving the Philomena over the weekend of 20/21 July, officials have been in contact with the French authorities and the representative association for the vessel. There has since been a meeting of UK and French fishermen's representatives and arrangements have been made for improved communication between the parties involved.

Farming Support

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what provision

there is to provide an aid package to support UK farmers whose pasture lands have become water-logged or been destroyed by persistent wet weather. [73120]

Mr. Morley: There is no routine provision to compensate farmers for the effects of bad weather. In exceptional circumstances, a Member State may apply to the European Commission to make special payments from national resources.

EU Legislation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many new pieces of legislation originating in the European Union were implemented by her Department in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [73140]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckinghamshire (Mr. John Bercow) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 935W.

Species (Population Levels)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent studies have been carried out into the number of *(a)* rabbits, *(b)* hares, *(c)* foxes, *(d)* grey crows, *(e)* magpies, *(f)* otters, *(g)* feral mink and *(h)* jays in England; and what trends have been detected in the population levels of each species. [73042]

Mr. Meacher: The Department is aware of a number of studies of the populations of mammals and birds in England. The most recent comprehensive estimates of rabbit, hare, fox, otter and mink populations were published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in *A Review of British Mammals: population estimates and conservation status of British Mammals other than cetaceans (1995).*

Estimates indicate that rabbit populations are increasing at around 1–2 per cent. each year. Brown hare populations are probably in continuing decline. Mountain hare populations are thought to be stable but, as expected, very localised. Fox populations appear to be stable in rural areas and increasing in urban areas. The otter is benefiting from reintroductions to the wild and is continuing to spread and increase. American mink numbers may be declining in some areas as a result of the spread of otters.

The British Trust for Ornithology conducts surveys of bird numbers in Britain. A 1988–91 survey estimated 590,000 magpie territories and 160,000 jay territories in Britain. Magpie numbers are estimated to have increased by a mean rate of 4–5 per cent. a year between 1966 and 1986 and to have stabilised thereafter. Jay populations have tended to increase on farmland and to decrease in woodland since the survey and overall, the population remained relatively stable or increased slightly up to 1995.

Grey or hooded crows are not regular breeders in England, although the picture is complicated by the existence of hybrids with the carrion crow.

Waste Disposal

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new arrangements there are to deal with the disposal in the United Kingdom of *(a)* refrigerators and *(b)* tyres; and if she will make a statement. [73191]

Mr. Meacher: I have already announced special grant funding of an extra £40 million for local authorities for this year. This is in addition to the £6 million already allocated for the last financial year. Additional help for future years was included in the Spending Review announced on 15 July.

The funding will enable local authorities to make full use of treatment facilities now up and running in the UK. Five "fridge eating" sites have been operating for a number of weeks. Two are due to come on line in August, and a further three later this year.

Under a voluntary, industry-led approach, the UK traditionally recovers value from around 70 per cent. of the tyres disposed of each year, although this dipped in 2000 due to the closure of a major tyre reprocessing facility. Since then, significant new tyre reprocessing capacity has been developed.

As well as having sufficient tyre reprocessing capacity, it will be important that the framework supporting the tyre landfill ban promotes responsible tyre disposal and recovery. Earlier this year, DTI issued a discussion document on used tyre issues which examined a possible statutory producer responsibility model. We are currently considering next steps in the light of the responses received.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of mechanical biological treatment techniques for waste disposal used in other European countries; [73478]

(2) if she will take measures to promote the use of mechanical biological treatment techniques in waste disposal in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement; [73479]

(3) what assessment she has made of the mechanical biological treatment practices of Island Waste Services. [73480]

Mr. Meacher: Mechanical biological treatment is used to manage the residue remaining after the recyclables have been removed from municipal waste. It employs conventional, proven techniques to remove any remaining recyclables and to stabilise the organic content by composting or anaerobic digestion. This material can then be landfilled or used as a fuel for energy recovery. The process is widely used in Germany and Italy and also in Austria and the Netherlands.

MBT is specifically designed to complement waste management strategies that are focussed on material recovery through recycling and composting by providing a flexible way of dealing with the residue. This type of treatment can assist in reaching the targets for the reduction of biodegradable municipal waste disposed of to landfill as set out in the Landfill Directive.

A bid by Shanks that includes mechanical biological treatment recently won preferred bidder status for a 25 year waste disposal contract with East London Waste Authority. Shanks will be using Italian technology under licence.

My understanding is that Island Waste Services produces a fuel from the residual municipal solid waste after material recovery including separate composting of green waste. The treatment of the fuel is solely by mechanical means, to achieve size reduction, without any element of biological treatment.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will take further measures to increase the amount of household waste which is recycled; and if she will make a statement; [73490]

(2) if she will take measures to achieve greater uniformity of waste disposal policy and practices by local authorities; and if she will make a statement. [73491]

Mr. Meacher: The Government already has a number of measures in place that will increase the future amount of household waste which is recycled. These measures include setting statutory performance standards for the percentage of waste that local authorities must recycle by 2003–04 and 2005–06, and additional financial support to help local authorities deliver these standards.

The standards we have set for local authorities take account of the performance that the authorities were reporting at the time. As a result, whilst all authorities are required to improve, there are variations in the percentages that authorities must deliver.

Our ambitions on waste disposal extend well beyond 2005–06 and we will seek continuous improvement in our recycling rates. We will consider longer-term recycling standards for individual local authorities in the light of experience and any technological developments. As a part of that consideration, we will take a view on the demands for improvement we place on those who are currently lower and higher performing authorities.

Generally, we consider local authorities are best placed to decide locally how best to meet existing standards, taking account of the nature of the local waste stream and issues such as the type of housing in their area. We have no plans for centrally imposing greater uniformity in the way local authorities collect and dispose of waste.

In November the Secretary of State announced that the Government's Strategy Unit would be carrying out a study on waste strategy. This study is assessing what extra instruments, changes to targets or regulations, and/or additional funding may be required to ensure that the strategy is effectively delivered and that we are able to develop more sustainable waste management. The Strategy Unit are due to report later in the year and we will make final decisions on future resources, and consider other policy measures, when the conclusions of the study are known.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the method of continuous sampling of dioxin emissions from waste disposal incinerators. [73482]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency is undertaking research into continuous dioxin sampling which includes market and literature searches, laboratory testing, and field trials, comparing "continuous" samplers with discontinuous methods. The research will establish which, if any, of the commercially available equipment can perform reliably and accurately, and inform the preparation of performance standards for these monitoring systems. The Agency anticipates that the research will be completed in Spring 2003.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial resources she has made available to local authorities in 2002–03 to help with the storage and disposal of refrigerators; and how much each local authority has been allocated. [72925]

Mr. Meacher: £6 million was allocated to local authorities for the extra costs they faced from 1 January to end March this year as a result of the disposal of refrigerators regulations. This money was added to local authorities' general grant for the current financial year and distributed using standard spending assessments. It is not possible to provide a meaningful allocation for each authority.

I announced on 18 July special grant funding of an extra £40 million for local authorities for this year. This is in addition to the £6 million already allocated for the last financial year.

Fuel Consumption

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the intelligent motor generator technology developed by Ricardo in reducing fuel consumption in road vehicles. [72625]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary to Transport (Mr. Jamieson) on 24 July, *Official Report*, column 1249W.

Meat Imports

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what controls on meat imports are in place to guard against foot and mouth and other diseases. [73654]

Mr Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what the level of funding for the Are You Doing Your Bit? campaign was in each year since 1998; what funds have been made available to support this campaign in (a) this and (b) the next three years; and if she will make a statement. [72744]

Are You Doing Your Bit? Campaign

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to enhance the effectiveness of the Are You Doing Your Bit? campaign; and if she will make a statement. [72743]

Mr. Meacher: Expenditure on the "Are you doing your bit?" campaign, covering both environmental and transport topics, was £3.4 million in 1998–99, £7.0 million in 1999–

2000 and £9.3 million in 2000–01. In 2001–02 most of the campaign's resources were reallocated to rural support, during the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and expenditure was £0.6 million. The Department is currently reviewing the effectiveness of public awareness activities in this area and in the meantime, in the current financial year, is making only minimal financial commitments on the "Are You Doing You Bit?" campaign. The distribution of budgets for public awareness activities for the following three financial years has yet to be decided, in the light of the overall figures for the Department settled in this year's Spending Review.

Biotechnology Research

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what biotechnology research projects in *(a)* agriculture and *(b)* biomedics have been supported by the Department; and what level of public investment has gone into them in each of the last three years. [73241]

Mr. Meacher: The biotechnology research projects funded by the Department in the last 3 years in *(a) Agriculture* are available in the Library of the House. The total costs over this period are summarised in the table below:

	*1999–2000 (£millions)**	*2000–01 (£millions)**	*2001–02 (£millions)*	*2002–03 (£millions)****
GM and Non-GM biotechnology	23.4	27	27.3	24
Research to underpin safety assessment of GMOs in the environment	1.9	2.4**	2.4**	2.9**
Total spend on Biotechnology	25.3	29.4	29.7	26.9

* Figures include relevant DETR and MAFF programmes.
** Figures exclude food-related risk assessment projects, which were transferred to the Food Standards Agency.
*** All figures are provisional.

(b) *Biomedics*—The Department does not support research in this area.

Biotechnology is defined as the application of biological organisms, systems and processes to manufacturing and service industries. This definition covers genetic modification (GM) research but goes much wider to include, among other techniques, fused cell techniques, protein engineering, fermentation and cell culture techniques, the production of vaccines and monoclonal antibodies.

Plastic Recyling Facilities

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the availability of plastic recyling facilities in *(a)* the South West and *(b)* Somerset. [73249]

Mr. Meacher: The Department does not keep a central record of recycling facilities. However, there are a number of internet sites that can search for your nearest recycling facility.

I understand from one of the local authorities in the area that two local authorities in Somerset collect plastic bottles for recycling—Taunton Deane Borough Council and South Somerset District Council. In addition, 4 Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) run by the county also collect plastic bottles.

I also understand that the operating contracts for 13 of the HWRC's are due to be renegotiated shortly. I understand that the new contracts will make a stronger commitment to recycling in Somerset and many sites will introduce plastic collection.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent proposals he has put to European colleagues for the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. [73210]

Mr. Morley: On 10 July, the European Commission published its proposals for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. These form a good basis for discussion, and in many ways respond to UK calls that significant reform of the CAP is required. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the UK's initial response to the proposals at the 15 July EU Agriculture Council. As she explained, the Government believes that the general thrust of the proposals of further market reform, decoupling of direct payments from production, and reinforcement of the rural development regulation is the right one. But in a number of key areas we consider that the proposals do not go far enough and do not adequately respond to the challenges ahead. In particular, the Commission's proposals on modulation would simply recycle money within the CAP while we would like to have seen a proposal which reduced subsidies while delivering real budgetary savings.

Departmental Jobs

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many jobs under the remit of her Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by her Department and other such organisations are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72730]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The table below shows the number of staff in the former MAFF and its executive agencies located in the regions specified as at 1 April 2001, the latest date for which published data is available. The requested information on non-departmental public bodies and other independent statutory bodies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dept/Body/ Organisation	Scotland No. (FTE)	Scotland per cent.	London No. (FTE)	London per cent.	Rest of England No. (FTE)	Rest of England per cent.	Wales No. (FTE)	Wales per cent.	Northern Ireland No. (FTE)	Northern Ireland per cent.	Overseas No. (FTE)	Overseas per cent.	Total (FTE)
MAFF (a)	76	1	1943	28	4919	70	117	2	0	0	6	0	7061
CEFAS (c)	0	0	0	0	480	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	480
CSL (c)	0	0	0	0	580	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	580
FRCA (c)	0	0	23	3	645	96	4	1	0	0	0	0	672
PSD (c)	0	0	1	1	181	99	0	0	0	0	0	0	182
VLA (c)	38	3	772	68	296	26	29	3	0	0	0	0	1135
VMD (c)	0	0	109	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	109

Key:
(a) Core department (excluding agencies)
(c) Executive agencies

EU Agriculture Council

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 309W, which Scottish Executive Minister she met on 15 July in Brussels prior to the EU Agriculture Council meeting. [72708]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* On this occasion the Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Affairs was represented by an official.

Pesticides

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research her Department has carried out to determine the level of pesticide residues in food within the UK; what checks are carried out on imported foods to determine the level of pesticide residues; and what plans she has to introduce statutory targets to reduce the use of pesticides in food production. [73202]

Mr. Morley: The Government conducts a wide-ranging annual surveillance programme for pesticide residues in food including imported food. Some 4,000 samples are analysed annually and the programme generates results for over 100,000 pesticide/commodity food combinations. All the results are published on a website: www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/PRC/prc.htm

The Maximum Residue Levels regulations apply equally to imports. Additionally, the general provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990 apply at all times. The food safety requirements are that food must not have been rendered injurious to health; be unfit; or be so contaminated—whether by extraneous matter or otherwise—that it would be unreasonable to expect it to be sold in that state. These legislative controls are backed up by the monitoring programme described above. Around half of the samples tested are of imported food.

The Government has no plans to introduce statutory targets to reduce the use of pesticides in food production

Farm Waste

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish her consultation paper on farm waste. [72169]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* We are preparing the Regulations necessary to apply the provisions of the Waste Framework Directive to those types of agricultural waste which are not excluded from control under Article 2. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is also being prepared. On completion, the draft Regulations and RIA will be issued for consultation with the farming industry and other interested groups. A firm date for publication of the consultation paper has not yet been set but our aim is to publish it in the Autumn. I will ensure that a copy of the consultation paper is sent to the hon. Member when it is issued.

Anglo-Scottish Ministerial Meetings

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings her Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72719]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Information is not available in the form requested. Ministers from the Department have frequent meetings with Ministers from the Scottish Executive, both formal and informal, covering a broad range of topics.

Illegal Meat Products

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what outbreaks of disease in animals in Somerset have been linked to the import of illegal meat products in the past five years. [73250]

Mr. Morley: There have been no outbreaks of exotic notifiable disease in Somerset in the last five years other than Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001. It is not possible to determine the exact route by which that virus entered the country.

Trees

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps *(a)* have been taken and *(b)* are planned by her Department to increase the number of trees planted in the South West; and if she will make a statement. [73251]

Mr. Morley: With support from the Woodland Grant Scheme and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, private woodland owners in the South West created some 1,300 hectares of woodland last year. This is nearly double the amount planted five years ago. We have also provided extra support in certain parts of the South West through initiatives such as the Community Forest Premium and Challenge Schemes for new native woodland in National Parks and for reversing fragmentation of woodlands. As to the future, we are currently reviewing our grant schemes with a view to achieving, among other things,

improved targeting of support for new woodland in accordance with the priorities in our England Forestry Strategy.

Standstill Rule

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on the 20-day standstill rule in Somerset. [73252]

Mr. Morley: Representations about the 20-day standstill have been received from industry organisations and individual farmers from many different areas.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the practical implications of the 20-day standstill order on agricultural shows in Somerset. [73253]

Mr. Morley: The current rules already allow animals of all species to move to shows even if there is a standstill in place on their farm of origin, to move from show to show or to return to their farm of origin without triggering a 20-day standstill, provided they are individually identified and kept in approved isolation facilities for 20 days before the first show, between shows and on final return to the farm.

I am also aware that a number of show organisers across the country have taken steps to adjust their schedules so as to work with the standstill rules.

Lundy Island

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will consult *(a)* hon. Members whose constituencies have fishing interests, *(b)* fishermen's organisations and *(c)* other groups before a decision is made to impose a fishing ban in the vicinity of Lundy Island; [72947]

(2) what evidence has been supplied to her by English Nature on the impact of imposing a fishing ban in the vicinity of Lundy Island; and what assessment of such evidence will be carried out by her officials before a decision is made. [72946]

Mr. Morley: The byelaw to implement a "No Take Zone" around Lundy Island has been proposed by Devon Sea Fisheries Committee (SFC) who are responsible for fisheries management in the area concerned. In proposing the byelaw, the SFC has taken advice from English Nature to comply with the statutory requirement in the case of byelaws proposed on marine environmental grounds. Consultation by the SFC has taken place with local fishing interests and formal public consultation will follow. This will be held in line with the statutory requirements of the Sea Fisheries (Byelaws) Regulations 1985 which require the byelaw to be advertised in publications circulating in the local district and any other publication which the Secretary of State may require.

In confirming the byelaw, this Department will look to ensure that all statutory requirements have been met, any objections received from the publication of the byelaw have been dealt with satisfactorily by the SFC and that the byelaw will not operate in a discriminatory or inequitable way. This Department will also need European Commission approval of the byelaw.

Sea Levels

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent evaluation her Department has carried out on the risk posed to seaside communities by rising sea levels; and if she will make a statement. [72945]

Mr. Morley: The updated National Appraisal of Assets at Risk of Flooding and Coastal Erosion in England and Wales, distributed in September 2001 by DEFRA, provided a revised comprehensive estimate of risks from flooding and coastal erosion, including a preliminary assessment of the potential change of impact associated with climate change. The risk to coastal communities was included in this assessment.

Management of coastal risk from flooding and coastal erosion is informed through the development of Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs). The earliest of the first round of SMPs is now due for revision. Research by DEFRA to improve understanding of coastal erosion processes around the coastline of England and Wales will be made available soon to coastal authorities to assist development of the second round of SMPs. This includes guidance on the likely impact of sea level rise on coastal processes. This improved understanding will allow an assessment of the likely change of risk to coastal communities as a result of sea level rise to be made during review of the local SMP.

DEFRA manages the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) which reported on regional climate change impact earlier this year. Research carried out under UKCIP does not suggest that the sea level rise allowances used in the design of flood and coastal erosion management solutions needs to be changed for the time being.

Illegal Importation of Meat

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action Customs and Excise are taking in Scotland against the illegal importation of meat from China. [73001]

Mr. Morley: I am advised that the Food Standards Agency has issued a Food Hazard Warning to local authorities and investigations are taking place to establish the source and extent of the illegal importation of meat from China. Any illegally imported meat, and products containing illegally imported meat, are being controlled by local authorities.

Flooding

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Environment Agency will *(a)* commence and *(b)* complete the feasibility study into the causes and relief of flooding in Salmon's Brook in the Lea Valley; and if she will make a statement. [73022]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency plans to commence the Salmons Brook Feasibility Study in August this year and it is expected to be complete in 12 months.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 310W, what evaluation has taken place of the effectiveness of the

Environment Agency in identifying the case for investment in flood alleviation measures following the flooding of October 2000; and if she will make a statement. [73012]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency's medium term plans for capital works are produced on an annual basis and in both 2001 and 2002 included proposed improvement works for many conurbations affected by the Autumn 2000 flooding. Works are already in progress at some locations, including Bewdley, Shrewsbury, Malton and Norton, all of which were flooded. The Agency is still investigating the case for other works in areas affected by the 2000 floods. The Department keeps in close touch with the Agency on its plans.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what PSAs have been set for the Environment Agency regarding *(a)* flood forecasting, *(b)* flood warning and *(c)* flood alleviation; and if she will make a statement. [73019]

Mr. Morley: PSAs are only set for Government Departments. However, in 1999 DEFRA's Flood Management Division developed a series of High Level Targets which require the Environment Agency to report on flood and coastal defence issues on a regular basis. A copy of these Targets was placed in the House Libraries on 23 November 1999. Documents reporting on performance against individual High Level Targets were also placed in the House Libraries on 24 May 2002

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what time scale is set for the Environment Agency to complete the investment in flood alleviation measures arising from a flooding incident; and if she will make a statement. [73020]

Mr. Morley: There is no set timescale for taking forward work associated with flood alleviation measures as this depends on the severity, duration and complexity of individual flooding events. The Environment Agency routinely investigates all incidents of flooding to determine any lessons learned, and revises its procedures accordingly as well as bringing forward flood alleviation measures if required and justified.

RSPB

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money by way of grants and subsidies her Department has paid to the RSPB, broken down by category, in each of the last five years. [71747]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Direct payments made by the department, since its creation in June 2001, have amounted to £25,000 in 2001–02 and £100,000 in 2002–03 to date. The RSPB may further receive EU funding and grants indirectly from other DEFRA funded bodies. Collecting information on indirect funding and payments made prior to 2001–02 would involve disproportionate cost.

Pesticides

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the farming industry on reduction of the use of pesticides. [73199]

Mr. Morley: The Government is committed to minimising the adverse effects of pesticides. This includes the development and promotion of ways in which farmers can limit their pesticide use. In spring 2001 we invited the industry to implement the *Voluntary Initiative*—a package of measures aimed at reducing the environmental impact of pesticides. The Government is keeping the progress of the *Voluntary Initiative* under review to assess whether it is delivering real environmental benefits. DEFRA Ministers met with farming and other representatives in May to discuss progress.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has had from environmental groups on pesticide residues in food. [73201]

Mr. Morley: Officials from the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), an executive agency of the Department, has received correspondence from various environmental groups, including Friends of the Earth (FoE) and Pesticides Action Network UK (PAN UK), on pesticide residues in food.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* representatives of the food retail industry and *(b)* consumer representatives on pesticide residues in food. [73200]

Mr. Morley: Officials from the Department meet regularly with representatives of the food retail industry and consumer representatives on pesticide residues in food, in various capacities. The Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC), which oversees the Government's pesticide residues surveillance programme, held its first open meeting last year. Various organisations attended, including representatives from both the food retail industry and consumer groups. Details of the attendees are available on the PRC's website:

www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/PRC/prc.htm

Examples of organisations my officials met with in the last year are the Chilled Food Association and the Infant and Dietetic Food Association.

County and Agricultural Shows

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost was to public funds of her Department's exhibition stands at county and agricultural shows held since 1 April. [73174]

Margaret Beckett: Our records show that as at the end of June 2002, current payments made relating to the financial year 2002–03 by DEFRA for exhibition and related stand costs incurred by attendance at county and agricultural shows totalled £695,121.

EU Advisory Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Advisory Committee on food stuffs is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the

United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [63636]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate for the Advisory Committee for Foodstuffs is set out in European Commission Decision 1980/1073/EEC. The Committee may be consulted by the Commission on any matter relating to the harmonisation of foodstuffs legislation.

The Committee, whose term of office is three years, is composed of ten permanent members and twenty experts, and the secretariat is provided by the Commission. It represents socio-economic interest groups concerned about food safety, such as agriculture, commerce, consumers, industry and workers, and is chaired by a permanent member of one of the economic groups. The Committee has not met during the last twelve months.

The Committee is accountable solely to the Commission which pays the travel and subsistence costs of members amounting to approximately € 290,000 for each meeting. There are no additional costs to the United Kingdom's public funds.

Chernobyl

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations remain in force to deal with the impact of Chernobyl radioactive pollution; which geographical areas are affected; and if she will make a statement. [72991]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The regulations which remain in force to deal with the impact of Chernobyl radioactive pollution, and the geographical areas covered, are as follows:

For England, The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (England) (Partial Revocation) Order 1996, S.I. 1996 No. 62, covering parts of Cumbria For Scotland, The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (Scotland) (Partial Revocation) Order 2001, S.S.I—2001 No. 313, covering parts of East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire and Stirling Council areas.

For Wales, The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (Wales) (Partial revocation) Order 1998, S.I. 1998 No. 72, covering parts of Conwy, Gwynedd and North Powys.

Each regulation specifies the exact areas to which the controls apply.

All restrictions were removed from Northern Ireland in April 2000.

DEFENCE

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72714]

Dr. Lewis Moonie *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Information is not available in the form requested. Defence Ministers have frequent meetings with Ministers from the Scottish Executive, both formal and informal, covering a broad range of topics.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in his Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72648]

Dr. Lewis Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 24 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 614W by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72258]

Dr. Lewis Moonie: All Special Advisers' contacts with the media, and speeches and presentations made by them, are conducted in accordance with the requirement of the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers. All Ministry of Defence civil servants, including special advisers, are expected to keep the Department's Director of Corporate Communications or delegated officer informed of contacts with the media. Details of such contacts are for internal purposes only.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70548]

Dr. Lewis Moonie *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Details of full time personnel who worked in the Ministry of Defence central Press Office in the last five years, together with the number of established posts, is shown in the table below:

Financial Year	*Number of full time personnel*	*Number of established posts*
1997–98	20	*
1998–99	18	19
1999–2000	18	18
2000–01	33	19
2001–02	28	24

*information no longer available

The number of full time personnel includes those employed at any time during the Financial Year. Staff changes will cause these figures to be higher than those shown for established posts.

No records are held on the number of secondees to the Press Office.

Code of Practice on Access to Government Information

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if applicants requesting information under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information are sent an acknowledgement by his Department that their request has been received. [72621]

Dr. Moonie: It is Ministry of Defence policy to answer all such requests under the terms of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information whether or not it is mentioned by individual applicants. It is not general practice in the Ministry of Defence to acknowledge requests for information unless a substantive response cannot be given within 20 working days.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to whom in his Department applicants under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information should address their requests for information; and what the address is of this contact point. [72620]

Dr. Moonie: It is Ministry of Defence policy that all requests for information should be handled in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Accordingly, there is no specific person to whom such requests need to be addressed. The MOD Internet site gives contact points for some subjects that attract frequent requests for information, an e-mail address for other enquiries and an address for the Ministerial Correspondence Unit. Our Information Leaflet "MOD and Open Government" is currently being revised to update the contact details and other information given there. In the meantime, Appendix 6 to the Lord Chancellor's Monitoring Report for 2001 gives details for the section which has the policy lead in MOD on the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Parliamentary Answers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website; [72293]

(2) for how long he retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website. [72264]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence aims to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon Members' questions. Where it is appropriate to refer hon Members to other documents as part of the substantive reply, this may be done by making hard copies available in the Libraries of the House, or by reference to material available on the MOD website at http://www.mod.uk. However, some documents referred to in parliamentary answers are published by organisations outside the Department and these will not necessarily be appropriate for inclusion on the Department's website. Additionally, not all documents produced by the Department are available electronically.

If a document on the Department's website has been referred to in a parliamentary answer it will generally continue to be available there. Some information of a transitory nature—for example the operational low flying timetable—will be updated periodically, but most reports and policy papers are retained permanently without amendment. Because the structure of the Department's website changes over time, document addresses given in parliamentary answers may also change, but significant documents will almost certainly continue to be available elsewhere on the website.

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of publishing his Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70475]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence meets the requirement to report past performance and future spending plans to Parliament by producing two separate documents—the Government's Expenditure Plans (published in the spring), and the Departmental Performance Report (published in the autumn).

The costs of printing and publishing these reports are largely borne by The Stationery Office, with whom the contract for producing Command Papers is held. The Stationery Office recoups these costs on a commercial basis through sales of the Reports, including those copies purchased by the MOD for its own use. The MOD also pays for any additional printing or publication costs not covered by the contract with The Stationery Office. Where these costs are readily identifiable they are shown in the following table. The remaining data are not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Year	*Government's Expenditure Plans (£)*	*Departmental Performance Report (£)*
1998	-	3,700
1999	-	7,100
2000	-	6,803
2001	4,768	12,610
2002	2,020	To be published in October

MOD staff costs associated with producing these reports cannot be accurately assessed, and are not therefore included in the above figures.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for 1997–98 and each subsequent financial year the amount spent by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its non-departmental public bodies in respect of hotel and other similar privately provided accommodation (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad for (A) Ministers, (B) staff and (C) other persons; if he will list the proportion of this cost incurred in respect of (x) food and (y) alcohol in each case; and if he will list the average cost per hotel room or similar unit of accommodation provided in each case. [34433]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 14 February, *Official Report*, columns 559–560W.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* from 5 May 1994 to 2 May 1997, *(b)* from 2 May 1997 to 7 May 1998, and *(c)* since 7 May 1998. [35603]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer provided by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 80W. Detailed information is not held centrally within the Ministry of Defence and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

I can say though that the Bristol, East constituency contains no MOD sites. However, it does form part of the Bristol Travel To Work Area where there is a number of MOD establishments including the headquarters for the Defence Procurement Agency and the Warship Support Agency that are both based at Abbey Wood in Bristol North-West. Abbey Wood opened in 1995 with the relocation of the then Procurement Executive. Over 500 staff were recruited locally in 1995–96. Now over 5,800 people work at the site; this will rise to over 6,800 in late 2002 with the further co-location of Warship Support Agency staff. In April 1994 there were 294 Full Time Equivalent civilian posts in the Bristol Travel To Work Area, which had increased to 4,039 Full Time Equivalent civilian posts by July 2001 largely as a result of the creation of the Abbey Wood headquarters.

Service posts are not counted by Travel To Work Area. But in July 2000 there were 87 Service posts in the Bristol Unitary Authority Area; this does not include Abbey Wood, which is in South Gloucestershire.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts his Department has with consultants; what level of professional indemnity insurance is standard in contracts with small consultants; whether he can make exceptions to the level of professional indemnity insurance; and what recent discussions he has had with other Government departments about the level of professional indemnity insurance. [50824]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* This information is not held centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The Ministry of Defence does not routinely impose a requirement for a standard level of professional indemnity insurance in contracts with small consultants. Most consultants will take out professional indemnity insurance with a policy value consistent with the risks associated with their business. Unless there are compelling business reasons to the contrary, MOD would not wish to interfere in this decision.

As MOD does not routinely impose a requirement for a standard level of professional indemnity insurance, then the question of exceptions to a standard level does not usually arise. However, MOD would not wish to allow any variations in the levels of professional indemnity insurance which could distort competition or could in any other way be seen as discriminatory. Inevitably, some contracts do carry special risks and, in these cases, it may be beneficial on value for money grounds for the MOD to exclude or limit the contractor's liability. Finally, as with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of discussions that form part of the process of policy development and analysis.

Munitions (Dean Hill)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated monthly maintenance costs to Defence Estates are from October 2003 in respect of Dean Hill Munitions Depot. [68915]

Mr. Ingram: The Depot is expected to be passed to Defence Estates for disposal in April 2004. An assessment of the monthly maintenance costs to cover responsibilities under the Occupiers of Premises Act will be made nearer to this time.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether homes at DM Dean Hill will be offered to tenants at the 2000 price; and if surplus housing will be offered for sale at this price. [72641]

Mr. Ingram: No decision has yet been made as to the value of the tenanted properties or the price at which they would be offered under the Ministry of Defence Discounted Sales to Sitting Tenants Scheme. Any surplus housing would be sold on the open market by competition.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the relative advantages of *(a)* natural temperature and humidity controlled storage of munitions and *(b)* above ground storage units in the case of terrorist or other hostile attack. [72638]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence carries out a continuous assessment of the likelihood and nature of threats to the security of its establishments and other assets. Existing security measures are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that they match the results of these assessments.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for the existing sports and social club if the closure of DM Dean Hill proceeds. [72640]

Mr. Ingram: No decision has yet been made about future plans for the sports and social club.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what weight was given to the opinions of the customer base when deciding the future of DM Dean Hill; and which customers made representations. [72642]

Mr. Ingram: In the course of conduct of the Defence Munitions Rationalisation Study (DMrs. 2) the study team consulted with all major stakeholders in the munitions business, those both internal and external to the Ministry of Defence. This included all of the MOD DLO/DPA

Munitions Integrated Project Teams (i.e. the authorities with ownership responsibility for MOD munitions), RAF Strike Command and those non MOD external customers of Defence Munitions with whom Defence Munitions has partnering/contractual arrangements (BAe Systems and MBDA (Matra BAe Dynamics Alena)). No representations on the closure of the depot were made by the bodies consulted.

Air Sea Rescue

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on air sea rescue in the UK in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2001–01, and *(c)* 2001–02. [69697]

Mr. Ingram: Air and sea rescue is undertaken by a large number of organisations in the UK and is conducted from a wide variety of locations utilising many different assets. The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

FYR Macedonia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service personnel are serving in FYR Macedonia. [70691]

Mr. Ingram: There are 35 United Kingdom service personnel presently deployed to Macedonia.

Three UK service personnel are seconded to the Macedonian Ministry of Defence; two as Defence Advisors and one as a Training Advisor. Three UK service personnel are deployed to Macedonia as part of the British Military Advisory and Training Team supplying low-level counter-insurgency training. The remaining 29 are deployed to Macedonia to provide support to NATO and UK forces in the Balkans.

Sustainable Development

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the interdepartmental discussions on Criterion 8 of the Consolidated Criteria relating to sustainable development. [71539]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's policy on Criterion Eight of the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria remains as stated in the criteria announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath on 26 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 199W. However, as stated by my noble Friend, Lord Sainsbury of Turville on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 73,

"the Government have recognised the need to consider how criterion eight . . . can most effectively be applied in assessing relevant export licence applications. The Government agree that there is a need for clearer procedures within Whitehall for reaching decisions where sustainable development is an issue."

The Government have agreed a two-stage process for assessing the impact of relevant proposed exports on sustainable development as defined in Criterion 8. First a non-exhaustive list of countries identifies those where sustainable development is most likely to be an issue. Second, in cases involving exports to those countries, the Government will look in more detail at the possible impact of relevant proposed exports on the economy or the sustainable development of the recipient country. All Departments involved in the export licensing process have agreed guidance for officials to assist with this process. This guidance is not on the interpretation of policy, which remains as set out in the Criteria, but in the procedures developed to assist in compiling the data necessary for the Government to make decisions.

The list of countries will reflect those destinations where the prevailing macro-economic and development conditions mean that an export is most likely to trigger concern about economic impact or sustainable development as defined in Criterion 8. Those countries eligible for concessional loans from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) have been chosen for these purposes as representing the world's poorest. Because the economic and development situation in these countries differs, this part of the process will identify, on a country by country basis, which ELAs the Department of Trade and Industry will pass to the Department for International Development, as well as to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Ministry of Defence, for more detailed assessment and advice. The Government will keep the list of countries under constant review to take account of changing circumstances. The list will be published on the DTI website. Additionally, at the request of any Government Department involved in the licensing process, any ELA may be examined for its impact on the economy or sustainable development of the recipient country as defined in Criterion 8 should that Government Department consider this appropriate in the light of the individual circumstances of that application.

To assist in carrying out the assessment required under Criterion 8 where an ELA has been identified as requiring this further detailed assessment, the Government have devised a series of indicators. In the interests of transparency, consistency and predictability, I will outline the nature of these indicators.

The indicators take account of both the conditions prevailing in the importing country and the potential impact of the export. They are designed to help assess whether the proposed export would seriously undermine the economy of the recipient country and whether it would seriously hamper its sustainable development as defined in Criterion 8. The indicators are: relative levels of military and social expenditure and level of military spending as a percentage of GNP; aid dependency compared with the regional average; state of public finances; balance of payments; external debt sustainability; economic and social development, i.e. GNP/capita and Human Development Index; the status of any IMF or World Bank-sponsored economic reform programme. The assessment will take into account the impact of the proposed export on the above indicators.

Criterion 8 refers to

"the compatibility of the arms exports with the technical and economic capacity of the recipient country, taking into account the desirability that states should achieve their legitimate needs of security and defence with the least diversion for armaments of human and economic resources".

The Department for International Development will raise any concerns about "least diversion" by reference to the other agreed indicators.

The cumulative impact of all arms imports to the destination country, not just exports from the UK, would be captured by the Criteria as a whole and by the above indicators.

Sources of information will include the IMF *Government Financial Statistics Yearbook*, IMF *Country Reports* and *Surveys*, IMF/World Bank *Annual Progress Reports on the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility* and, where appropriate, completion point documents from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. Information in the IMF's periodic publication, *Recent Economic Developments* and the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* as well as OECD statistics, data and country summaries may also be drawn on.

Export licensing decisions rest with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, taking account of both advice from other Departments, and whether to issue or refuse a licence would be consistent with the Consolidated Criteria as a whole. The Department for International Development as the lead Department for advice on sustainable development issues, will invariably provide advice, although other Departments may also provide advice.

The F680 process, through which the Government provide advice to industry on proposals for marketing or promoting products overseas, does not constitute an export licence. Neither is the existence or otherwise of an F680 approval a factor which is taken into account in the licensing decision. However, the Government have also decided to make procedural changes to the F680 process. Rather than as previously, commenting through FCO, the Department for International Development will be invited formally to comment directly on F680 applications.

Arms Transfers

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to establish a register of UK and EU arms brokers; and if he will oblige UK arms brokering and shipping agents to obtain licences for arms transfers even when the arms do not touch UK or EU territory. [73297]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

The Export Control Act 2002 will give the Government new powers allowing for controls to be imposed on arms trafficking and brokering.

The Government have proposed to set these powers to establish controls on the supply and delivery, and on acts calculated to promote the supply or delivery, of controlled goods from any overseas country to any arms-embargoed destination, and of long-range missiles and equipment whose export the Government [illegible] already banned because of evidence of its use in torture fr[illegible] overseas country to any other country. These controls [illegible] apply where any part of the activities takes place in the United Kingdom and to activities by United Kingdom persons anywhere.

The Government have also proposed to use the new powers in the Export Control Act to establish controls on various activities connected to trade in military equipment whose export is already subject to control. The activities that will be subject to control include acquisition or disposal of goods. They also include arranging a contract for the acquisition or disposal of goods, or doing any act calculated to promote the arranging of such a contract in return for a fee. The controls will apply where any part of the activities takes place in the United Kingdom. The controls will not apply to a person whose sole involvement in the movement of goods is to provide transportation, finance, insurance or general advertising or promotional services.

The Government propose to establish a register of information on all those applying for licences under the Export Control Act, regardless of nationality, both for exports and for the activities described above, thus creating a database available to be used for licensing and enforcement purposes.

Spare Military Equipment

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to sell reserve spare military equipment; and what measures are in place to monitor the availability of equipment for UK forces. [72542]

Dr. Moonie: When the Ministry of Defence updates its equipment, surplus and obsolete items are sold on a Government-to-Government basis, by competitive tender, public auction or through an incentivised marketing partnership with industry in order to achieve the best return for the taxpayer. When declared as surplus, the disposal by sale of defence assets rests solely with the Ministry of Defence's Disposal Services Agency (DSA). I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 12 June *Official Report*, column 1260W to my hon. Friend for Reading, East (Ms Griffiths) that recorded the DSA's Key Targets for financial year 2002–03. I also refer to the DSA's Annual Report and Accounts that was laid before the House on 19 July and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House upon publication.

The Ministry of Defence has a comprehensive set of procedures in place to ensure the availability of equipment to the front line and ensure that timely action is taken in the event that problems are identified. The Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) has Customer Supplier Agreements (CSAs) with front line commands that set out logistic support requirements all of which are monitored regularly in terms of performance. The Disposal Services Agency has a Customer Supplier Agreement with the Defence Logistics Organisation to ensure that clear disposal targets are set and monitored.

Military Exports

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 491W, if he will list companies and individuals who in each of the last five years exported military supplies and who were based in *(a)* mainland UK, *(b)* the Channel Islands and *(c)* the Isle of Man. [72786]

Dr. Moonie: Information held by the United Kingdom Government on companies and individuals involved in the export of military supplies is commercial in confidence and is withheld under Sections 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Jersey,

Guernsey and the Isle of Man operate their own systems of export control closely modelled on that of the UK. Any export licence applications forwarded to the UK Government for advice by their authorities are also commercial in confidence and are also withheld under Sections 13 and 14 of the Code of Practice.

Fairford Tattoo

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what air traffic control restrictions on movements into and out of RAF Brize Norton are necessitated by the air tattoo at RAF Fairford; for what reason the C-17s are training out of RAF Lyneham during the Fairford Tattoo; what consideration his study of RAF Brize Norton, RAF Lyneham and RAF St Mowgan is giving to air traffic control issues; and if he will make a statement. [72863]

Mr. Ingram: There were no air traffic control restrictions on movements into and out of RAF Brize Norton necessitated by the air tattoo at RAF Fairford. A Temporary Restriction on Airspace was implemented, which increased the size of the Station's standard Control Zone.

On 18 July, the "arrival day" of the RAF Fairford Air Tattoo, the C17 that was to attend the event completed a number of training circuits at RAF Lyneham. This training could have been undertaken at any location where suitable support and infrastructure facilities exist. It is not unusual for aircrew to undertake training away from their station as this increases the variety and thus value of their training.

Appropriate consultation and assessment is being undertaken on the air traffic control aspects of the basing options being considered as part of the Strategic Review. It would not be appropriate to comment on specific details of the Strategic Review until the report is complete.

12 Mechanised Brigade

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to bring the 12 Mechanised Infantry Brigade at Aldershot up to full manpower strength. [72937]

Mr. Ingram: 12 Mechanised Brigade is a grouping of Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery regiments and supporting units, together with many supporting cap badges that are based throughout the country. The major units are stationed at Aldershot, Pirbright and Tidworth.

The Brigade is an integral part of the Formation Readiness Cycle (FRC). As such, it spends one year providing troops for standing operations, one year in intensive training for war fighting, and on year as the Army's High Readiness Mechanised Brigade. During the High Readiness Year, the Brigade is liable for short-notice deployments in response to emerging crisis throughout the world. Under the FRC, elements of 12 Mechanised Brigade are already deployed: the Welsh Guards are in the Balkans, and Brigade Headquarters and 228 Signal Squadron, as well as 1 Battalion the Staffordshire Regiment (Armoured Infantry Battalion) will deploy to Kosovo (Operation AGRICOLA) between November 2002 and May 2003. The Brigade routinely requires augmentation from individuals or formed sub-units to meet the particular requirements of the roles it performs.

Currently, 12 Mechanised Brigade's strength is 2,773 personnel; 98 per cent of its required liability of 2,824 personnel. There are no specific recruitment drives aimed at manning 12 Mechanised Brigade, however, action is being taken in a wide range of areas with the aim of increasing Army recruiting, both for officers and soldiers, co-ordinated by the Army Training and Recruiting Agency's Recruiting Group. Indeed, from 1 April 2002, 93 Regimental Recruiting Teams (RRTs), encompassing existing RRTs and the former Mobile Display Teams, staffed by Field Army personnel have been in operation.

Army Infantry Units

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on allowing regular Army infantry units some special forces training in order to upgrade skills and make them more versatile. [72934]

Mr. Ingram: Regular infantry units do not require Special Forces training. The infantry has available to it the training appropriate to its role.

Manoeuvre Brigades

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the shortfall in manpower is in each of the six manoeuvre brigades. [72938]

Mr. Ingram: The liability and actual strength of each of the six manoeuvre brigades is detailed in the table below:

	Establishment requirement	*Actual strength*	*As a percentage*
1 UK Armoured Division			
4 Armoured Brigade	4,579	4,239	93
7 Armoured Brigade	4,903	4,587	94
20 Armoured Brigade	3,945	3,706	94
3 (UK) Division			
1 Mechanised Brigade	2,234	2,171	97
12 Mechanised Brigade	2,824	2,773	98
19 Mechanised Brigade	2,234	2,071	92

Pay as you Dine

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the MoD will begin pilot projects on the selected sites to trial Pay as you Dine for military sites. [71800]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Pay As You Dine (PAYD) trials are to be progressively launched at 10 military sites within Great Britain over the next eight months. The first two trials will begin at Hyde Park Barracks, London (target start early September 2002) and HMS Seahawk, Helston, Cornwall (target start by the end of September 2002). A start date for the third trial at RAF Henlow, Bedfordshire has not yet been finalised, but is expected to be towards the end of October 2002.

The remaining seven trial sites will be:

Norton Manor Camp, Taunton; Marchwood Military Port; Cawdor Barracks, Haverfordwest; Battlesbury Barracks, Warminster; Wattisham Airfield, Ipswich; Fort George, Inverness and RAF Leuchars, North East Fife.

Negotiations with industry about launching trials at these remaining sites will not begin until the first two trials are successfully underway, so it is not possible to be precise about start dates, but the aim is to have all ten trials running by April 2003.

Military Sites (Somerset)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list active military sites in Somerset. [73261]

Dr. Moonie: The following sites belonging to the Ministry of Defence are active in Somerset:

ACIO and satellite—35 East Street, Taunton
Hydrographic Office, Taunton
Mount House, Taunton
Norton Manor Camp, Taunton
Bombing Range, Bridgwater Bay
RNAS Yeovilton
Maltravers House, Yeovil
Yoxter Range, Priddy
Langport Range
Merryfield Airfield, Ilchester

MOD Sites in Bristol, Bath and the former county of Avon have been excluded.

Land Ownership (Hampshire)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sites in his Department's ownership in Hampshire are under review with regard to their continuing use by his Department; when a decision is expected on each of these sites; and if he will make a statement. [70756]

Dr. Moonie: All Ministry of Defence sites in Great Britain are currently under review by the MOD Core Sites team to achieve the objective set out in the MOD Estate Strategy, of identifying Core Sites by the end of 2002. This list will be used to inform future decisions regarding the utilisation of the estate.

Housing

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much military service personnel housing is owned by his Department in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* overseas, [54643]

Dr. Moonie: Most of the Families Quarters estate in England and Wales was sold to Annington Homes Ltd (AHL) in November 1996. The Defence Housing Executive (DHE) leases back from AHL the properties it needs to house Service families (some 45,000).

However, a number of Service Family Quarters in England and Wales continue to be directly owned by the Ministry of Defence, as do all those in Scotland.

So far as overseas locations are concerned, many of the properties used are not owned by MOD but are hirings or form part of an MOU or agreement with the country concerned. In Germany, for example, Service Families Accommodation (some 8,456 units) is owned by the Federal Government, although the MOD has stewardship of it.

The most recent figures available are:

Area	*Number of Quarters*
England Scotland and Wales	52,600 in total (of which only some 7,000 are owned by MOD or leased under PFI arrangements)
England Scotland and Wales—identified for disposal	2,500 (mainly AHL but figure cannot be split further)
England Scotland and Wales—managed empty	6,300 (mainly AHL but will include some owned properties)
Northern Ireland	3,200
Overseas	10,787

The figures for housing in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are as at 2 April 2002. The figures for housing overseas are drawn from the Stewardship Report on the Defence Estate published in January 2002 and represents the latest available figures. All figures exclude Single Living Accommodation (SLA).

Annington Homes Ltd.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue loss to public funds of the sale of the Defence Service families accommodation to Annington Homes Ltd. in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [73685]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not available. The sale of the Married Quarters Estate to Annington Homes Ltd took place in November 1996, under the previous Administration and raised £1.662 billion for the Exchequer. Since then the Sale Agreement has been the subject of parliamentary and financial scrutiny and I would refer my hon. Friend to the House of Commons Defence Committee Report of the Sale of the Married Quarters Estate (HC94) dated 19 February 1997 and the Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General on The Sale of the Married Quarters Estate dated 31 July 1997.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1138W, how much has been received by the Exchequer under the Sale of Agreement profit share scheme with Annington Homes Limited in respect of former service families' accommodation in *(a)* Colchester and *(b)* England and Wales; and what the average share from sales of dwellings was in (i) Colchester and (ii) England and Wales; [73023]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1138W, how many service families' accommodation units in England and Wales were sold to Annington Homes Limited; and what the average price per dwelling was; [73025]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1138W, how much has been paid to Annington Homes Limited for family quarters in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Colchester, *(c)* Scotland and

(d) Northern Ireland since the sale of service families' accommodation and the commencement of the leaseback agreement. [73024]

Dr. Moonie: No receipts from the profit share arrangements have so far been received for properties released at Colchester. 46 properties passed to Annington at the time of the sale in 1996 did not trigger a profit share payment when sold. A further release of 36 properties is expected to result in a receipt. But this has yet to be finalised.

More than 12,000 properties have been released to Annington to date. 8,716 properties have subsequently been sold by Annington. A proportion of these have triggered profit share payments totalling £44.92 million. The average profit share payment is thus £5,154.

The sale to Anningtons of 57,428 properties in England and Wales raised £1.662 billion for the Exchequer. The average price per dwelling was approximately £29,000.

Service families' accommodation in Scotland and Northern Ireland was not included in the sale to Annington. Since the sale in November 1996, Annington has received £665 million in rent for properties in England and Wales, including £16.5 million for family quarters in Colchester. The rent paid to Annington is discounted by 58 per cent. from the market value inter alia, to reflect the Ministry of Defence's continuing maintenance responsibility.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the *(a)* Defence Housing Executive and *(b)* Addington Housing Association are permitted to raise funds on the private market based on the rental income of his Department's properties. [73028]

Dr. Moonie: In 1996 most Service families' accommodation in England and Wales was sold to Annington Homes Limited (AHL). Under the Sale Agreement, the Ministry of Defence underleases properties from Annington Homes to meet Service requirements. The Defence Housing Executive (DHE), an Agency of the MOD, manages and maintains the underleased properties but does not receive any private sector funding so to do. Annington Homes Ltd is a commercial organisation, and I would suggest that my hon Friend contacts them directly for information about their financial arrangements. DHE also acquires a proportion of its new housing stock through Public Private Partnership arrangements for which its partners do raise funds on the commercial market.

Army Deaths

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many soldiers from Scotland are included in the injury-related deaths in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and Germany between 1990 and 2002 involving serving members of the Army at army bases; [72707]

(2) how many of the injury-related deaths involving serving members of the Army at army bases in Great Britain between 1990 and 2002 occurred at army bases in Scotland; [72703]

(3) how many of the injury-related deaths involving serving members of the Army at army bases in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and Germany between 1990 and 2002 were linked to an army-issued weapon. [72704]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 9 July 2002 *Official Report*, column 848W) to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). The specific information requested concerning the origin of soldiers suffering injury-related deaths and the precise location of these deaths is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, between 1 January 1990 and 23 July 2002 there have been 188 reported deaths of Army personnel due to the discharge of firearms. Again, information on the weapon involved in each case is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Retired Disabled Officers

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retired disabled officers in receipt of a pension granted on account of medical unfitness attributable to military service have been assessed by the War Pensions Agency as having a 0 per cent. level of disability. [72852]

Dr. Moonie: Attributable disablement pensions may be awarded to officers and other ranks under either the War Pension Scheme (WPS) or the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS). Under the WPS, War Disablement Pensions or Gratuities would not be awarded in cases where the level of disability is assessed at 0 per cent. Under the AFPS, a Service Attributable Pension would similarly not be paid for conditions where the level of disability is assessed at 0 per cent. Service Invaliding Pensions may be in payment for attributable conditions at 0 per cent. but we could only establish the numbers involved by a review of individual files. The costs of such an exercise would be disproportionate.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retired disabled officers in receipt of a pension granted on account of medical unfitness attributable to military service who have been identified as potentially entitled to a refund of wrongly deducted income tax *(a)* have received a full refund, *(b)* have been declined a refund and *(c)* have their cases subject to review. [72851]

Dr. Moonie: Of the 1,028 pensioners who have received a full refund of income tax from the Inland Revenue, 46 are retired officers.

Details of the number of retired officers found not to be eligible to receive a refund of tax, or whose cases remain subject to review, are not held, although the total numbers, comprising both retired officers and other ranks, are available. These indicate that to date, the records of 53,503 personnel have been examined and a refund of tax found not to be due, and that 1,466 cases remain subject to review.

Medical Treatment

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which private sector providers were selected in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 to date for the treatment of armed

forces personnel, stating in each case (i) the number of personnel treated in that year and (ii) the cost to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [54133]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* The information requested, covering the Financial Years 2000–01, 2001–02 and 2002–03 to date, is shown below.

Financial Year	*Number of Referrals*	*Private Healthcare Providers*	*Cost (£M)*
2000–01	1,634	BUPA, Nuffield Hospitals Group, BMI, Priory, Cygnet, Foxleigh Grove, The Retreat, Caprio, Independent, NHS	0.769
2001–02	2,419	BUPA, Nuffield Hospitals Group, BMI, Priory, Cygnet, Trees Park, Caprio, Independent, NHS	4.095
2002–03 to date	467	BUPA, Nuffield Hospitals Group, BMI, Caprio, Independent, NHS	0.837

Notes:
1. The details provided cover central initiatives managed by the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA), the use of private psychiatric facilities by the DSCA, initiatives run by the Royal Navy and the Army Training and Recruiting Agency (ATRA), plus local RAF referrals. The ATRA arrangements for the referral of potential recruits to private healthcare providers for pre-entry screening are not included, as they are not members of the Armed Forces.
2. Figures are shown for the numbers of referrals. Patients may have had more than one referral. Numbers of patients could only be identified at disproportionate effort.
3. Cost figures represent invoices paid in each financial year. The number of referrals does not correlate precisely with the cost figure for each financial year since some invoices may not be presented/paid until a subsequent financial year.
4. Referrals in 2000–01 include 41 in 2000 for which no associated costs are available and 12, at a cost of £2500, covering 2000–01 and 2001–02 which cannot be apportioned separately to each financial year.
5. Cost figure for 2001–02 is estimated as the final figure is not yet available.
6. Cost figure for 2002–03 represents expenditure to date.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to the answer of 21 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 597W, on medical treatment, on what date the Rapid Treatment Initiative commenced and with what budget; by what criteria personnel are treated under the scheme; how many personnel in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Navy and *(c)* the RAF have been treated under the initiative and at what cost to his Department in each month since commencement; which health care providers have been used under the scheme; and if he will make a statement; [65237]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 21 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 597W, on medical treatment, on what date the Waiting List Initiative commenced and with what budget; by what criteria personnel are treated under the scheme; how many personnel in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Navy and *(c)* the RAF have been treated under the initiative and at what cost to his Department in each month since commencement; which health care providers have been used under the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [65236]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 3 July 2002]:* Following competition, contracts were placed in 2000 with the Nuffield Hospitals Group and BUPA to provide treatment for a Ministry of Defence Waiting List Initiative (WLI). The WLI accepted referrals from 17 November 2000 to 31 March 2001. Treatments were undertaken up to 30 June 2001 and only exceptionally beyond that date. The budget for the initiative was £2.5 million.

Service patients were referred from shortage occupations on the basis that they were expected to be fit for military operational deployment within six to nine months of treatment. The total number of referrals into the scheme by Service was:

Service	*Referrals*
Royal Navy	168
Army	805
Royal Air Force	435
Total	1,408

Because of the number of hospitals participating in the scheme nation-wide and the number of patients treated, invoices submitted covered variable time periods with some information being provided months after treatments. Consequently, neither the invoice values nor payments made relate directly to individual months and it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the number of patients treated and the associated costs on such a basis. The total amount paid to the contractors for the WLI was some £2.2 million.

Further contracts were placed with the same independent sector healthcare providers for the MOD Rapid Treatment Initiative (RTI). Referrals were accepted during a four-week period in January 2002. Most treatments were completed by 31 March 2002 with a number remaining to be undertaken in June and July. The budget for the Initiative was £1.1 million.

The Initiative was open to Service patients requiring simple acute procedures, who were expected to be fit for normal duties within six months of treatment and who had at least 18 months left to serve in the Armed Forces. The total number of referrals into the scheme by Service was:

Service	*Referrals*
Royal Navy	51
Army	327
Royal Air Force	201
Total	579

As with the WLI, records held do not allow for the information on patients treated or costs to be readily supplied by month. As at 3 July this year, the amount paid for treatment under the RTI, for patients treated up to 31 March 2002, was some £664,000.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gulf War veterans in the Portsmouth South constituency have been diagnosed with symptoms connected to Gulf War Syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [64481]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not recognise "Gulf War Syndrome" as a medical condition. It accepts that some veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf conflict

have become ill and that many believe this ill health is unusual and related to their Gulf experience. A large number of multi-system, multi-organ, non-specific, medically unexplained symptoms have been reported by some Gulf veterans as well as recognised medical conditions. The overwhelming consensus of the scientific and medical community is that there is insufficient evidence to enable this ill-health to be characterised as a unique illness, condition or "syndrome". With the exception of certain infectious diseases that are notifiable by statute, primary care doctors in England and Wales do not report centrally illnesses experienced by their patients. Therefore, the MOD is not able to assess the number of Gulf veterans in the Portsmouth, South constituency who have reported illnesses to their doctors. MOD is advised of cancer registrations in England, Wales and Scotland. We have published data on the incidence of cancer-related deaths in Gulf veterans as compared to a comparable group of Service personnel who did not deploy to the Gulf. Gulf veterans who wish to be examined by a physician expert in Gulf veterans' illnesses can be referred by their doctors to the Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme (GVMAP) which is funded by the MOD. As of 18 July 2002, 16 Gulf veterans had been seen at the GVMAP who were recorded as living in the Portsmouth, South constituency. Of these 12 were assessed as well at the time of their consultation.

Nuclear Safety

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to test the level of UK compliance with the new REPPIR nuclear safety regulations; what requirements are set down by the Health and Safety Executive in respect of the new nuclear safety regulations; and whether his Department has provided the HSE with information to calculate safety zone distances in respect of a nuclear accident. [73187]

Mr. Ingram: The Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 sets down the requirements and responsibilities of operators, carriers and local authorities in responding to a reasonably foreseeable radiation emergency.

The Ministry of Defence has undertaken assessments to identify the hazards and evaluate the risks from the Defence Nuclear Programme and has provided to the Health and Safety Executive reports of these assessments including, where appropriate, the area which is likely to be affected by the dispersal of any radioactive substance.

The MOD maintains contingency plans to deal with accidents involving defence nuclear materials and conducts regular nuclear accident response exercises designed to test these plans.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what nuclear weapons accident exercises his Department plans to hold in the next 12 months. [73186]

Mr. Ingram: The following table gives the current date, name and location of the nuclear weapon accident response exercises that are scheduled to take place during the remainder of 2002. The nuclear weapon exercise programme for 2003 is not yet finalised.

Month	*Name*	*Location*
August	Convoy NAR team Standardisation	Leicestershire
September	RAF Station NAR team Standardisation*	Northamptonshire
October	UK/US Table Top Exercise	Norfolk
October	RAF Station NAR team Standardisation*	Suffolk

*RAF Station Nuclear Accident Response (NAR) teams provide immediate response forces for the air transportation of nuclear weapons.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what lessons were learnt from the nuclear weapons accident exercises in East Anglia conducted on 24 May. [73185]

Mr. Ingram: There were no formal nuclear weapon accident response exercises held in East Anglia on 24 May 2002.

The Nuclear Weapon Convoy Group were however conducting training in East Anglia at this time as part of an ongoing training programme to ensure that the highest standards of safety and security are maintained. The details of this operational training are classified and I am therefore withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the transfer of activities at Rolls Royce Nuclear, Derby, qualifies for its appraisal under REPPIR. [73188]

Mr. Ingram: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the commercial activities of Rolls Royce at Derby and the application of Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations (REPPIR). They are a matter for the company and the Health and Safety Executive as the regulatory authority for REPPIR.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for bringing the non-legislative LAESI guidelines into line with the new REPPIR requirements in respect of the transport of nuclear materials. [73300]

Mr. Ingram: LAESI neither provides safety guidelines or regulations, but provides the Local Authorities and Emergency Services with information on contingency arrangements for accidents during the transport of nuclear weapons, special nuclear material and new and used submarine reactor fuel (known collectively as Defence Nuclear Materials). Our arrangements, as detailed in LAESI, have regard to all current statutory requirements, including Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations (REPPIR), and are kept under regular review.

Afghanistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest estimate is of expenditure by his Department on operations in Afghanistan. [36936]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 26 February *Official Report*, column 1133–34W to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) as part of our presentation of Spring Supplementary Estimates to the House, we estimate the total cost of operations in Afghanistan in financial year 2001–02 to be some £261 million. This figure includes the cost of munitions consumed and represents the additional cost of operations over and above the cost of planned activities.

Procurement

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment in use with the armed forces has been procured from abroad. [72933]

Dr. Moonie: The internationalisation of high technology industries, including defence, means that almost all equipment will be sourced from a range of companies and locations.

The Ministry of Defence's first responsibility as a customer is to ensure it gets value for money for the equipment required by the Armed Forces, principally by means of competition. We do not place constraints upon the nationality of equipment suppliers except for reasons of national security. However, when taking procurement decisions we do take into account wider issues such as security of supply, economic factors, industrial issues and foreign policy.

Details of the ownership of all the contractors from whom we have procured in-service defence equipment, some of which was procured more than thirty years ago, are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Two Operations Commitment

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the two operations commitment. [72939]

Mr. Ingram: The White Paper on the Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter, Cm5566, addressed this issue (paragraphs 31–32 and 91). Since the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) was published in 1998 the risk of large scale conflict in Europe has further reduced, and relations with Russia have seen a step change improvement. But we have also routinely deployed our Armed Forces on more operations concurrently than we envisaged in the SDR, though the scale of these deployments has been in some respects smaller than we envisaged at the time of the SDR. That has created the risk of overburdening key enabling units, who are essential for all expeditionary deployments (for example, communicators, engineers and movements personnel).

We now need to factor these evolutions in the strategic and operational environment more fully into our planning.

Defence Manufacturing

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have taken place with European colleagues on increasing defence manufacturing co-operation in Europe; and if he will make a statement on progress made since 1997. [72914]

Dr. Moonie: Discussions on this broad ranging topic take place routinely both bilaterally and in multilateral fora. We recognise the importance of such co-operation, and are engaged in a number of initiatives in Europe aimed at paving the way for more effective defence industrial co-operation, improving the management of co-operative equipment projects, as well as identifying further opportunities to co-operate where it makes military, industrial and economic sense to do so. Specifically in the defence manufacturing co-operation field, along with our colleagues in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden, we signed the Letter of Intent Framework Agreement in July 2000 related to measures to facilitate the restructuring and operation of the European defence industry. This Agreement represents a commitment by the six nations to remove obstacles to industrial restructuring and co-operation. All six nations, in conjunction with industry, continue to implement the Agreement.

Technology Centres

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many defence technology centres will be created; what the cost will be; and if he will make a statement on their use in securing more *(a)* foreign and *(b)* domestic contracts. [72913]

Dr. Moonie: The expectation is of six centres being launched, in two tranches of three each, with the Ministry of Defence funding of up to £5 million per centre per year. The supplier consortia are also expected to contribute funding. This investment will result in centres of expertise, focused in industry and academia, in technologies of importance to Defence. MOD will ensure that the centres' outputs can be transitioned effectively into equipment programmes for the United Kingdom Armed Forces. Beyond that, the consortia will own the intellectual property and be encouraged to exploit it in wider markets.

Future Strategic Tanker AirCraft Programme

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future strategic tanker aircraft programme; when the aircraft will come into service; and when the *(a)* VC-10 and *(b)* Tri-Star tankers will be retired. [72917]

Mr. Ingram: The Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (FSTA) is planned to replace our VC10 and TriStar air-to-air refuelling aircraft. An Invitation to Negotiate for this potential PFI contract was issued to industry in December 2000. Bids were received from two consortia in July 2001 and we are currently in negotiations with both bidders. FSTA is planned to enter service in 2008 and is expected to be fully operational by 2012. The existing RAF refuelling fleet is made up of two aircraft

types comprising 19 VC10s and 6 TriStars. On current plans, the VC10s are due to go out of service by the end of the decade with the TriStars leaving service shortly afterwards. Precise dates can be amended, as necessary, to ensure a smooth transition to the new planned FSTA fleet.

Hospital Ships

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the proposed timetable and specification are for the construction of the proposed two hospital ships. [72396]

Dr. Moonie: Hospital ships are subject to a number of constraints under the Geneva conventions which limit their military utility severely. I assume therefore that the hon Member is referring to our requirement for an afloat primary casualty receiving capability. This project entered its Assessment Phase last year, and the project team is currently investigating a number of possible solutions to the requirement, including purpose-built or converted shipping, and modular solutions based on other hulls as required. It is therefore too early to suggest a particular specification or timetable for the chosen solution's construction, but the capability is expected to enter service later this decade.

Submarines

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent developments have been made in submarine air independent propulsion; what the implications of this are for diesel submarines; and if he will make a statement on the future of diesel submarines in the Royal Navy. [72537]

Dr. Moonie: We are monitoring the developments in submarine air independent propulsion technologies. Our Maritime Underwater Future Capability programme is looking into the range of future capabilities required by the United Kingdom for the control and denial of the underwater battlespace into the third and fourth decades of the century. We will be considering a wide range of concepts, including innovative solutions combining unmanned underwater vehicles, ships, airborne and land assets, as well as submarines. Our studies will assess the alternative future power source technologies for submarines and unmanned underwater vehicles, but it is too early to make any decisions.

SA80

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent in modifying the SA80; and what plans he has to *(a)* modify and *(b)* replace the rifle. [72534]

Mr. Hoon: The approved cost limit of the SA80 modification programme is £92 million and to date £15.5 million has been spent. On current plans the SA80 A2 is due to remain in service until 2020 but will be replaced from 2015 onwards.

In common with all weapon systems, refinements may be made during its service life.

A400M

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the German commitment to the A400M project; what problems have been encountered with compatibility with the C-130; and what the capability of the aircraft is. [72535]

Dr. Moonie: We have been assured by the German Government of their continued commitment to the A400M project. We hope very much that Germany will secure all outstanding parliamentary approvals at the earliest opportunity so that we may press ahead with this important collaborative project.

Our C-130J and A400M aircraft will fulfil complementary roles; we do not anticipate any compatibility issues. The A400M will be a strategic transport asset, capable of carrying a maximum payload of 32 tonnes for a nominal distance of 2,300 nautical miles non-stop. This capability exceeds significantly that provided by the C-130K aircraft it will replace.

The A400M will have advanced avionics and mission systems, allowing the aircraft to be operated by a three man crew.

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been taken to increase the reliability of the Challenger and Warrior armoured vehicles; and what the future replacement of these vehicles will be. [72536]

Dr. Moonie: There are no specific reliability problems with either the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank (MBT) or the Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle. We are, however, always looking for opportunities to improve.

For Challenger 2 specific measures include work to prolong the life of the gearbox, the engine and the track. Trials are also planned to take place in the Autumn to look for ways to reduce dust ingestion. Warrior reliability and safety has already been improved through ammunition feed and transmission modifications and measures are being taken to improve the life of the engine, gearbox and track. Warrior is also due to receive a major upgrade in 2010 which will result in a new turret, an improved cannon and a more sophisticated gun control system.

Challenger 2 and Warrior are due to remain in service until around 2025 and as such the future replacement of these vehicles is only at the very early concept stage.

FIST

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what developments are to be undertaken with FIST; and if he will make a statement. [72541]

Dr. Moonie: The Future Integrated Soldier Technology (FIST) programme will bring the benefits of enhanced technology to the soldier by providing an integrated suite of equipment. The programme will enhance the mission effectiveness of those soldiers committed to dismounted close combat.

A competition is underway to choose a prime contractor for the Assessment Phase. The Defence Procurement Agency is currently assessing bids from BAe Systems Ltd, Marconi Mobile Ltd, Raytheon Systems Ltd and Thales Optronics Ltd. Down selection from four to

two companies is scheduled for next month. The selection of the single Prime Contractor for the Assessment Phase programme is planned for early 2003.

C103J

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional expenditure there has been to provide load masters on RAF C103Js with protective headgear; and if he will make a statement. [71714]

Dr. Moonie: When deployed on operational duties, load masters on the RAF C103J aircraft are issued with either the Mk 4A/4 or Mk 4B/4L flying helmet. For head protection, these helmets are standard inventory items and have not resulted in additional expenditure for the C103J.

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which unmanned aerial vehicles are being assessed by his Department; and with what countries these systems are in service. [71640]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Watchkeeper programme is the only programme in which unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are being assessed. Under this programme, an initial assessment is being made of unmanned aerial vehicles developed from the following: Hermes 450, Predator, Eagle, Firescout, Shadow 200, Hermes 180, Ranger and Spectre 3. A number of these vehicles will shortly be selected for a more extensive assessment. We are aware that the Predator vehicle is used by US forces, the Hermes 450 is in service in Israel, and Ranger is in service in Switzerland.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been done into unmanned and uninhabited aerial vehicles; how many of these vehicles the armed forces possess; and what plans there are to extend their use. [72918]

Dr. Moonie: Research into UAVs has been conducted in a range of areas. For example, the Observer technical demonstrator, completed in 2001, examined a small UAV system assessing aerial vehicles, sensors and operator interfaces. The lessons identified fed directly into the Watchkeeper programme. Other research has looked at, and continues to examine, areas such as the potential for man portable UAVs and the potential contribution of UAVs in providing mobile communication platforms to extend the battlespace information infrastructure.

Phoenix is the only UAV system currently in service with the Armed Forces, for which 198 aerial vehicles were purchased.

In addition to the Watchkeeper programme (which will provide a surveillance and target acquisition capability principally in support of land commanders), UAVs are also being considered as potential solutions to elements of the Maritime Airborne Surveillance and Control programme and as a possible contribution to the Future Offensive Air System.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to conduct an impact assessment study of the influence of the Watchkeeper contract on future procurement decisions; and if he will make a statement. [70765]

Dr. Moonie: None.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Watchkeeper programme; what funding has been allocated to it; and what its capability is intended to be. [72916]

Dr. Moonie: Watchkeeper is being acquired to increase the capability of the Armed Forces to undertake Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance tasks. Watchkeeper will principally support land commanders from Battlegroup to Divisional level and will meet a significant proportion of their intelligence and information requirements. The Watchkeeper system will comprise UAVs, sensor packages and associated facilities on the ground to collate, exploit and disseminate the information gathered. The numbers and types of UAVs and the architecture of the overall system are currently being examined in the assessment phase where operational and technical risks are being identified and minimised. We would expect to spend around £860 million acquiring the Watchkeeper system.

Air Defence

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what air defence will be provided for the Royal Navy between 2007 and 2012. [72936]

Mr. Ingram: United Kingdom maritime forces normally operate as part of a Task Group, which protects itself against air attack through a series of "layered" defences. Task Groups typically include Type 42 Anti-Air Warfare Destroyers and Type 22 and 23 Frigates equipped with air defence capability. Many other Task Group warships will also include air defence assets for self protection and decoy systems against air and surface launched anti-ship missiles. The Type 42 Destroyers will be replaced by the Type 45 Destroyers, fitted with the highly capable Principle Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS). The First of Class Type 45 Destroyer is planned to enter service from late 2007. The first upgraded AEW Sea King Flight will go to sea later this year and will provide a marked improvement in capability to detect airborne threats to the Task Group over both sea and land.

Military Aircraft Manufacturing

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of UK military aircraft manufacturing in Britain; and what measures are being taken to maintain and expand the industry. [72935]

Dr. Moonie: The United Kingdom military aircraft sector is efficient, innovative and highly competitive, and with these qualities it has very strong potential for success in the future. Given the importance of the industry for the supply of equipment to our Armed Forces, not to mention its role as a significant employer, the Government has of course a close interest in its success. The industry already benefits from a large programme of Ministry of Defence work on projects including JSF, Eurofighter, Nimrod, A400M and Apache. Future programmes such as the Future Strategic Transport Aircraft project are also likely to result in a significant programme of work for UK

companies. And we will continue to take industrial factors into account within the medium of our competitive procurement policy.

The Government is committed to investing in defence research and technology in partnership with industry, which is crucial in sustaining a viable and competitive industrial base long-term, while focusing more effectively on areas where we achieve best return and where UK industry can be world class. We have also recently extended the tax breaks that are available to companies investing in research and technology.

We will also continue to pursue vigorously the importance of liberalising defence trade and technology flows between our allies. We give strong support to the industry's bids for export orders, and we also welcome inward investment bringing high-value skills and technologies into the UK industrial base.

Battlefield Target Identification

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce ground-to-ground battlefield target identification device equipment; and if he will make a statement. [71914]

Dr. Lewis Moonie: Since February 1999 the Ministry of Defence has conducted research into the feasibility of introducing a ground-to-ground target identification system. As a result we have successfully demonstrated a Battlefield Target Identification Device (BTID): We are now fully engaged with our NATO allies as part of the US-led Advanced Concept Technology Demonstrator programme, which aims to develop a joint coalition concept of operations and to demonstrate interoperability amongst national BTID prototype solutions. A decision on whether to introduce a ground-to-ground target identification system has yet to be made.

Tracer/Watchkeeper Programmes

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost has been to date of the *(a)* Tracer and *(b)* Watchkeeper programmes. [70667]

Dr. Lewis Moonie *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The cost of the Tracer programme to the United Kingdom to the end of June was some £120 million. By the time the assessment phase contract is concluded at the end of July 2002 we expect to have spent a further £11 million. Although in October 2001 the Ministry of Defence agreed with the United States DoD not to proceed beyond the assessment phase with this collaborative programme, we expect to apply directly the technical maturity and military utility of a number of key armoured vehicle technologies to the Future Rapid Effect System programme.

Expenditure to date on the Watchkeeper programme is some £26 million.

Galileo Satellite Navigation System

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what strategic military implications he estimates the proposed Galileo satellite navigation system is likely to have. [70699]

Dr. Moonie: The EU Transport Council has called for interoperability between the civil Galileo programme and the United States Global Positioning System, which is used by NATO for military purposes, to be guaranteed by an EU/US agreement. Accordingly, I do not anticipate that Galileo will have strategic military implications for the United Kingdom or for our allies and partners.

ScanEagle

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to use the ScanEagle system for British reconnaissance missions; and if he will make a statement. [70428]

Dr. Moonie: ScanEagle is part of a wider system of UAVs currently being considered, along with a number of other approaches, as a possible contender for the Maritime Airborne Surveillance and Control (MASC) capability. MASC is due to enter service in 2012 and no decision will be taken on the preferred solution prior to the Main Gate approval currently scheduled for 2006.

HEALTH

Lactose Intolerance

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many lactose-intolerant children between the ages of *(a)* 0 to 5, *(b)* 5 to 11 and *(c)* 11 to 18 there were in each of the last 15 years. [72656]

Jacqui Smith: Data from the Department's Hospital Episode Statistics show the number of children between the ages 0–5, 6–11 and 12–18 years admitted for lactose intolerance in National Health Service Hospitals in England during the period 1989–90 to 2000–01 is shown in the table. Data from 1986 to 1988 are not available.

Table 1. Number of children between the ages 0–5, 6–11 and 12–18 years admitted for lactose intolerance in NHS Hospitals in England during the period 1989–90 to 2000–01

	Age of children (years)		
Year	*0–5*	*6–11*	*12–18*
1989–90	184	13	12
1990–91	235	11	4
1991–92	213	15	6
1992–93	188	22	10
1993–94	163	23	9
1994–95	140	15	8
1995–96	113	14	7
1996–97	123	13	8
1997–98	113	7	6
1998–99	123	18	5
1999–2000	124	11	8
2000–01	88	13	4

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked within his Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72650]

Mr. Lammy: The Department does not hold information on the number of employees under contract from temping agencies.

The amount spent on staff from temping agencies for the period requested is shown in the table.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
(a) As a total[2]	see note[1]	£6,699,209	£8,776,817	£7,339,730	£7,589,927
(b) as a percentage of the total staffing budget	see note[1]	5 per cent.	6 per cent.	5 per cent.	5 per cent.

Source:
Figures are taken from the department's accounting system.
[1] Comparable figures for 1997–98 is not available.
[2] Includes staff obtained from agencies to cover work of messengers and typists. Also includes cost of information technology staff employed from agencies and IT contractors.

Looked-after Children (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have looked-after status in the Portsmouth, South constituency; and if he will make a statement. [72672]

Jacqui Smith: There were 250 looked-after children in the unitary authority Portsmouth at 31 March 2001. This excludes children looked after in an agreed series of short-term placements.

Waiting Times

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank NHS trusts in England in order of the highest waiting times for hospital operations, according to the numbers waiting *(a)* over six months and *(b)* over 12 months for in-patient treatments, at the latest date for which figures are available. [72668]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of patients waiting over six months and over 12 months for elective admission at National Health Service trusts in England as at 31 May 2002 has been placed in the Library. The trusts are ranked, with the trust with the highest number of six month waits at the top.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when information on waiting times data from primary care trusts will be published. [72669]

Mr. Hutton: Waiting times data about primary care trusts that provide consultant inpatient and consultant outpatient services have been published since April 2001.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been waiting over one year for inpatient treatment in West Surrey. [71910]

Ms Blears: Figures for Quarter 4 of 2001–02, March 2002, show that 558 patients in the former West Surrey Health Authority area had waited over twelve months for inpatient treatment.

Chronic Respiratory Diseases

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to improve services for pulmonary rehabilitation for those suffering from chronic respiratory diseases. [72928]

Ms Blears: We are aware that provision of pulmonary rehabilitation is a service increasingly offered by local departments of respiratory medicine.

It is a decision for primary care trusts, in partnership with other local stakeholders, to assess the health needs of their populations, including those needing pulmonary rehabilitation, and to commission services to meet those needs.

We have also commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to prepare clinical guidelines for the National Health Service in England and Wales for the prevention, diagnosis, management and treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It is expected that the guidelines should be issued around February 2004.

Hospital Appointments

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the practice of hospital appointments officers deferring putting patients on waiting lists until a time nearer an available appointment, with particular reference to the case of Mr. William Wood of Solihull. [73449]

Mr. Hutton: Patients referred for a first outpatient appointment with a consultant should be placed on the outpatient waiting list from the date the referral was received by the Trust. Inpatients should be placed on the inpatient list from the date a consultant makes a decision to admit.

Unfortunately, Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull National Health Service trust have been unable to identify the individual patient referred to. Mr. Woods may wish to contact the trust, who would be happy to look into his circumstances. Alternatively, if the hon. Member would like to write to me giving further details and Mr. Wood's written consent to investigate, I will instruct my officials to look into the matter further.

Golden Hellos

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many golden hello awards of £10,000 have been paid to qualifying medical practitioners, broken down by *(a)* month and *(b)* health authority, since April 2001; [73500]

(2) how many golden hello awards have been refused to medical practitioners, broken down by *(a)* month and *(b)* health authority, since April 2001; for what reasons; and if he will make a statement. [73501]

Mr. Hutton: Information relating to when health authorities make payments in respect of this scheme is not held centrally. Application forms forwarded to the

Department by health authorities for monitoring purposes indicate that at least 630 general practitioners (GPs) have received a payment of £10,000. Information broken down by health authority is shown in the table.

Information on applications that have been refused by health authorities or primary care trusts is not held centrally.

It is for health authorities/primary care trusts to determine whether a GP is eligible to receive payment, in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department.

Number of £10,000 Payments made by Health Authorities

Financial Year 2001–02 *Health Authority*	*No.*
Avon	7
Barking and Havering	2
Barnet Enfield and Haringey	7
Bradford	6
Bury and Rochdale	5
Calderdale and Kirklees	5
Cambridgeshire	8
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1
County Durham	19
Coventry	3
Croydon	11
Doncaster	6
Dorset	5
East Kent	10
East Lancashire	10
East Riding	4
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	5
Kingston and Richmond	2
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	20
Leeds	3
Lincolnshire	2
Liverpool	6
Manchester	4
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth	13
Newcastle and North Tyneside	6
Norfolk	5
North and East Devon	4
North Cheshire	12
North Derbyshire	6
North Essex	2
North Nottinghamshire	6
North Staffordshire	7
North West Lancashire	1
Northamptonshire	2
Northumberland	3
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	9
Rotherham	13
Salford and Trafford	13
Sandwell	5
Sefton	5
Sheffield	4
Shropshire	8
Solihull	3
South and West Devon	7
South Cheshire	3
South Derbyshire	5
South Humber	1
South Lancashire	2
South Staffordshire	8
Stockport	3
Suffolk	10
Sunderland	8
Tees	6
Walsall	1
Warwickshire	3
West Pennine	7
West Surrey	4
West Sussex	9
Wigan and Bolton	9
Wirral	3
Wolverhampton	9
Worcestershire	5
Total for 2001–02	381

Note:
Due to the reconfiguration of health authorities into strategic health authorities on 1 April 2002, this information has been broken down into two financial years.

Financial year 2002–03 *Strategic Health Authority*	*No.*
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	5
Birmingham and Black Country	3
Cheshire and Merseyside	7
County Durham and Tees	14
Coventry Warwickshire Herefordshire and Worcestershire	3
Cumbria and Lancashire	16
Essex	13
Greater Manchester	16
Kent and Medway	11
Leicestershire Northamptonshire and Rutland	8
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	8
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	5
North Central London	1
North East London	19
North West London	6
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	20
Shropshire and Staffordshire	9
South East London	25
South West London	8
South West Peninsula	6
South Yorkshire	11
Surrey and Sussex	27
Trent	6
West Yorkshire	2
Total for 2002–03 to date	249

Elderly Care (Birmingham)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue will be made available to Birmingham Social Services Department to pay for services for elderly people as a result of the measures announced in his statement on 23 July. [73546]

Jacqui Smith: All local councils will benefit from the extra resources announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer when personal social services resources are set to increase by on average 6 per cent. per annum in real terms over the next three years, 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06. Details of how the increases for next year's social services resources will be allocated to individual local councils will be announced later this year at the time of the local government settlement.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will consult medical experts and interested organisations with a view to conducting a review of his Department's decision not to include cystic fibrosis on the list of readily identifiable conditions; [73634]

(2) for what reasons cystic fibrosis is not included on the list of readily identifiable conditions; [73635]

(3) what plans he has to include in the near future cystic fibrosis on the list of readily identifiable conditions in order to exempt sufferers from prescription charges. [73636]

Mr. Lammy: Our policy is to give priority to helping people who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people with other medical conditions such as cystic fibrosis.

When we reviewed the prescription charging arrangements as part of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review, we noted that there was no consensus on what additional conditions might be included in any revised list of medical exemptions, or how distinctions could be drawn between one condition and another. We concluded that it would not be right to consider one group in isolation.

Design Champion

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1140W, on the Design Champion, if he will make a statement on the Design Champion's input into *(a)* Walsall Design Examplar and *(b)* South Manchester Primary Care Trust Development. [73640]

Mr. Lammy: In his capacity as ministerial design champion for the Department, my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, is personally mentoring four schemes. Walsall and South Manchester were on the original list but the final list includes the following four:

Central Manchester Teaching Hospitals National Health Service Trust

University Hospitals Birmingham National Health Service Trust/South Birmingham Mental Health Trust

Braunstone Integrated Health and Social Care Leicester City West Primary Care Trust

Walsall Hospitals National Health Service Trust Design Exemplar

My noble Friend has visited and had meetings with the trust project teams at Central Manchester and University Hospitals Birmingham.

He has met the Braunstone project team, trust Chief Executive and Chair. Visits to Braunstone and Walsall are being arranged.

Silverlands, Chertsey

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's plans are for the future use of the property Silverlands, near Chertsey. [73648]

Mr. Lammy: The Department is undertaking a review of possible usage for the National Health Service.

Sleep Apnoea

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to encourage good practice in *(a)* the treatment at primary care level and *(b)* the self-management of sleep apnoea. [72927]

Ms Blears: Awareness about this condition has developed relatively recently nevertheless, there are already some specialised National Health Service sleep disorder services being developed. Examples are St Thomas's Hospital, London and at hospitals in Cambridge and Leicester. This should form the basis for building expertise within the NHS, and developing uniform service provision.

Primary care trusts, in partnership with local stakeholders, have the responsibility for deciding what services to provide for their populations including those with sleep apnoea. They are best placed to understand local health needs and commission services to meet them.

Roaccutane

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Medical Control Agency will report on the effects of the drug Roaccutane; and if he will make a statement. [73141]

Mr. Lammy: Roaccutane (isotretinoin) is licensed for the treatment of conglobate and cystic acne and severe acne which has failed to respond to antibiotics.

The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) is currently leading a European-wide review of the safety of Roaccutane, which will consider the balance of risks and benefits and will aim to ensure that up to date and consistent information is provided to health professionals and patients to optimise its safe use. This is likely to take several months.

The safety and side effects of all medicines on the United Kingdom market are continuously monitored by the MCA with independent expert advice from the committee on safety of medicines. The side effects known or suspected to be caused by Roaccutane are listed in the product information which is produced by the manufacturer and authorised by the licensing authority. The product information consists of a summary of product characteristics for healthcare professionals and a patient information leaflet.

Early Pregnancy Unit

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is per pregnancy of an early pregnancy unit. [72994]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not available centrally.

Ectopic Pregnancy

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost is to the NHS of an ectopic pregnancy. [72993]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not available centrally.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ectopic pregnancies have occurred in each of the last 10 years; and how many women have *(a)* been hospitalised and *(b)* died as a result of ectopic pregnancies in each of the last 10 years. [72995]

Jacqui Smith: The information available on ectopic pregnancy is shown in the table.

Number of ectopic pregnancies and deaths from ectopic pregnancies

Triennium	*Estimated pregnancies (n, 1000s)*	*Estimated Ectopic pregnancies (n)*	*Ectopic pregnancies per 1000 pregnancies*	*Deaths from ectopic pregnancies (n)*	*Death rate**
1991–93	3139.5	30160	9.6	9	0.3
1994–96	2914.9	33550	11.5	12	0.4
1997–99	2873.3	31946	11.1	13	0.4

*per 1000 estimated ectopic pregnancies

Source:

Why Mothers Die 1997–99—Report from the Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the UK—December 2001.

Hospitalisation of women with ectopic pregnancy.

Numbers of episodes in hospital with a primary diagnosis of Ectopic Pregnancy

(ICD10 Code 000)	
1990–91	9231
1991–92	9978
1992–93	10074
1993–94	9694
1994–95	9722
1995–96	9525
1996–97	9557
1997–98	9324
1998–99	9116
1999–2000	8887
2000–01	8617*

*provisional

Data is grossed for coverage and missing data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the percentage of ectopic pregnancies caused by chlamydia infections. [72996]

Jacqui Smith: We are not aware of any research undertaken in this country on the percentage of ectopic pregnancies caused by genital chlamydial infection. However, results of a French study published in 1991 indicated that 43 per cent. of ectopic pregnancies were associated with genital chlamydial infection.

The rise in the rates of genital chlamydia infections is of concern and the national strategy for sexual health and HIV commits to beginning a programme of screening for chlamydia for targeted groups in 2002.

IVF

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps to change the HFEA's *(a)* code of practice and *(b)* operating procedures to prevent the pre-selection of physical or mental characteristics other than to find a match for those of the prospective father's characteristics or to provide a healthy embryo; [73037]

(2) if he will list the IVF clinics at which prospective parents seeking IVF treatment, may select by donor, *(a)* eye colour, *(b)* height, *(c)* build, *(d)* hair colour, *(e)* profession, *(f)* IQ, *(g)* sporting ability, *(h)* career achievement and *(i)* educational or professional qualification achievement, irrespective of their consistency with the father's characteristics; [73038]

(3) which donor sperm characteristics cannot be requested by potential parents seeking IVF treatment; [73035]

(4) if he will ask the HFEA to suspend the licence of IVF clinics that offer choice of donor sperm characteristics that are not consistent with those of the prospective father or necessary for the creation of a healthy baby. [73034]

Ms. Blears Where donated sperm, eggs or embryos are used in assisted conception treatment, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's (HFEA) code of practice and the authority's operating procedures put the utmost importance on the welfare of the child to be conceived. A treating clinic must comply with this requirement when choosing the donor to be used. If it does not do so, the HFEA will consider the appropriate action to take, including placing conditions on, or suspending or revoking, the clinic's licence.

The code of practice is currently being revised, and consideration will be given to the need for this message to be reinforced.

The HFEA is aware of recent media reports that some clinics may not be following these procedures. It is currently investigating to ascertain if a breach of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 or the code of practice has occurred.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what controls are in place to prevent the importation of donor sperm to meet desired genetic physical or mental characteristics other than those necessary to produce a healthy child with characteristics consistent with those of that child's prospective parents. [73036]

Ms Blears: The importation of donor sperm is subject to special directions issued by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) in each case. The reasons for the importation must be clearly stated, and the use of the sperm must comply with the requirements that the HFEA places on all treatment involving donated gametes.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what safeguards there are to prevent *(a)* clinics and *(b)* prospective parents intervening in IVF treatment to manipulate the physical or mental characteristics of an embryo, other than those necessary to ensure the health and well-being of the baby; and if he will make a statement. [73033]

Ms Blears: Schedule 2 paragraph 4 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 prohibits the alteration of the genetic structure of a cell while it forms part of an embryo. If a clinic did so, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority would take appropriate action, including placing conditions on, or suspending or revoking, the clinic's licence.

Growth Hormones

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the prescribing of growth hormones for adults on the NHS. [73111]

Ms Blears: Human growth hormone treatment for adults is currently available on the National Health Service subject to a patient's clinician deciding there is a need for such treatment.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently appraising the clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of human growth hormone in adults. We expect that they will announce their decision in October.

Departmental Vehicles

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vehicles he and his Ministers have access to, broken down by vehicle type; what the annual operating costs were in each of the last three financial years; how much it costs to convert a car so it is suitable for a Government Minister; and if he will make a statement. [72497]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The Department's Ministers currently have access to six cars:

1 Vauxhall Omega

1 Nissan Primera

2 Rover 45s

2 Ford Mondeos

The total operating costs for Ministerial cars in the last three financial years were:

2001–2002: £318,000

2000–2001: £315,000

1999–2000: £306,000

To make cars suitable for Government Ministers, the only modification required is to fit additional reading lights at a cost of £245 per vehicle.

Commission for Health Improvement

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he anticipates the Commission for Health Improvement being incorporated into the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection. [72480]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Legislation to establish the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Substance Abuse

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is available through the NHS for education and prevention of volatile substance abuse. [73373]

Ms Blears: The Department has issued drug education and prevention funding, £5 million in 2001–02 and £9 million in 2002–03, to primary care trusts (PCTs). This money is for PCTs, along with local agencies, to support the requirement to reduce the proportion of people under the age of 25 reporting the use of class A drugs by 25 per cent. by 2005. All PCTs and social services departments, in partnership with their local drug action team, will use this funding to commission, primary prevention activity for the general population and primary and secondary prevention activity for all young people identified as at risk, in accordance with the Department's guidelines. This includes education and prevention on solvents and volatile substances.

Heroin Addicts

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many known heroin addicts there are in *(a)* Britain, *(b)* Nottinghamshire and *(c)* Bassetlaw. [71392]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* This information is not available centrally.

The estimate of the number of drug misusers in the United Kingdom is between 200,000 and 220,000. The figure for Nottinghamshire and Bassetlaw is not calculated either centrally or locally at present.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what range of treatments are available for heroin addicts in *(a)* England and *(b)* Bassetlaw. [71393]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The types of structured treatment available in England are inpatient detoxification, specialist prescribing, general practitioner prescribing, counselling, day care and residential rehabilitation.

All of these are available to the residents of Bassetlaw, and are delivered by the local community drug team, the young peoples criminal justice team, FaceIT, SORTED, the needle and syringe exchange, Hettys (Families and Carers group) and WAM, as well as out of area residential providers.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many heroin addicts are undergoing treatment in *(a)* England, *(b)* Nottinghamshire and *(c)* Bassetlaw. [71390]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* This information is not available in the form requested.

We can provide data on the number of users presenting to drug misuse agencies (including both doctors and other agencies), with heroin as their main drug of misuse during the six month period ending 31 March 2001. These figures are shown in the table.

Number of persons presenting for treatment at drug agencies, with heroin reported as the main drug of misuse, during the six month period ending 31 March 2001

Area	*Number*
England	22,431
North Nottinghamshire HA	190
Nottingham HA	109

Note:
This data is derived from the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin *"Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases for six months ending March 2001"*.

The Office of National Statistics published the results of a special exercise that was carried out to estimate the number of drug users in treatment in England in 2000–01 (*"Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000–2001"* (2001). These are summarised in the table below.

Number of drug misusers in treatment

Area	*Number*
England	118,522
North Nottinghamshire HA	398
Nottingham HA	900

Note:
These figures are derived from the ONS analysis of data from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases for the six months ending March 2001 together with a census for April to September 2000.

The majority of misusers above were attending community drug services. Sixty-seven per cent. of those drug misusers entering treatment in England for the six months ending March 2001 reported heroin as the main drug of misuse. The percentage of those "in treatment" with heroin as the main drug of misuse is not available

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what method his Department uses to quantify the proportion of young people using heroin in Nottinghamshire. [71394]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The local regional centre for the national drug treatment monitoring system collects information on people presenting for treatment and the drugs misused. Information is also collected at 31 March each year for clients in contact during the year (starting at 31 March 2002); this includes whether they are still in treatment.

The national treatment agency for substance misuse (NTA) report that there is an estimate of the number of known young individuals with heroin addiction produced by the local drug action team (DAT). In 2001–02, the local DAT were aware of about 200 under 19s with a heroin addiction through reporting to them from the young peoples services in Mansfield and from COMPASS.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for treatment for heroin addiction was in the last 12 months. [71391]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Information provided to the national treatment agency (NTA) for substance misuse on waiting times (the number of weeks from when a drug user presents for treatment, to when appropriate services commence) in December 2001 is broken down by type of treatment rather than main drug of misuse. However the majority of all individuals entering treatment report heroin as their main drug of misuse. The waiting time information from the drug action team templates is shown in the table below.

Average Waiting Time by Modality of Treatment for England in December 2001

Treatment modality	*Average waiting time*
Inpatient detoxification	12 weeks
Specialist prescribing	14.1 weeks
GP prescribing	5.7 weeks
Counselling	7.6 weeks
Day care	6 weeks
Residential rehabilitation	9.1 weeks

Notes:
From drug action team template returns based on a "snapshot" taken in December 2001.

Drug Action Teams

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis funds are distributed between the drug action teams in England. [71396]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* £191.2 million for drugs misuse treatment services has been allocated to health authorities (HAs) in 2002–03, this represents an increase of £51.5 million or 36.9 per cent. over 2001–02, through the pooled treatment budget.

Allocations to HAs in 2002–03 for drugs misuse treatment services through the pooled treatment budget were informed by a new weighted capitation formula. This formula weights populations of 15–44 year olds for utilisation rates by age and sex, additional need and the market forces factor. All HAs received an increase of at least 30 per cent. over their allocation for 2001–02. The Department provided indicative allocations to drug action team level, but the final decision on allocations lies with the HA.

It should also be noted that additional funding from mainstream health budgets, social services community care budgets and the treatment element of the arrest referral scheme budget are allocated for drug treatment services at local level.

Asthma

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether primary care trusts will be required to audit the number of asthma deaths; and if he will make a statement. [71398]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* There are currently no plans to require primary care trusts to audit the number of asthma deaths.

The number of deaths from asthma is gradually declining. The Department's hospital episode statistics show in-hospital deaths, where the patient's main diagnosis was asthma, falling from 301 in 1998–99 to 213 in 2000–01.

The Office for National Statistics report that the international classification of disease, ICD9 493 (Asthma) recorded for England and Wales that in 1998 there were 1,366 deaths caused by asthma and by 2000 that had fallen to 1,272 deaths.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the Medical Research Council to give further priority to research into asthma; and if he will make a statement. [72096]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Asthma is a priority area for the Medical Research Council (MRC) and it supports a wide range of research projects looking at asthma ranging from basic research to applied clinical studies. The MRC spend in the area in 2000–01 was approximately £3 million. Under the terms of the Concordat, the Health Departments will be meeting with the MRC later this year. Respiratory disease will be a major item for discussion at this meeting.

Epilepsy

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he plans to address the information and support needs of bereaved families affected by SUDEP and other epilepsy deaths following the evidence of the National Sentinel Audit of Epilepsy-Related Death; [72664]

(2) what steps the Government are taking to ensure epilepsy sufferers receive regular checks on health and medication; [72661]

(3) whether steps are being taken to set a national target for reduction of epilepsy deaths; [72665]

(4) if implementation of the action plan addressing findings of the National Audit of Epilepsy-Related Death will include specific action by primary care trusts; [72667]

(5) what steps his Department is taking to promote awareness of epilepsy and the medical risks associated with it; [72658]

(6) whether the Home Office is being consulted on the action plan to address the finding in the National Audit of Epilepsy-related Death on the adequacy of post-mortem investigations; [72663]

(7) what plans there are for implementation of the action plan addressing the findings of the National Audit of Epilepsy-Related Death; and what funding will be made available for this purpose; [72666]

(8) what plans he has to address the findings of the epilepsy deaths report on the adequacy of post-mortem investigations; [72662]

(9) what measures his Department is taking to improve information and medical training for epilepsy sufferers and carers of people with epilepsy. [72657]

Jacqui Smith: In May 2002, we welcomed the publication of the Government funded national sentinel audit of epilepsy-related death. The audit looked at investigations into epilepsy deaths, care provided prior to death and contact with bereaved families. We have given a commitment to consider in full the recommendations of the audit and to develop an action plan later this year to address the key issues. It will need to take account of and feed into a range of other initiatives including the national service framework for long term conditions (NSF), which will have a focus on neurological conditions such as epilepsy. We expect to meet with the epilepsy voluntary organisations shortly, and will consult with others as appropriate.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published a summary report of the audit. The publication draws the attention of local National Health Service clinicians and organisations to the need to establish or review policies and practices regarding the management of epilepsy and epilepsy related deaths.

The Department is also undertaking a range of other initiatives to improve services for the care and management of people with epilepsy. For example, we have:

Asked NICE to develop a clinical guideline, due in summer 2004, for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of services. This will be supported by a technology appraisal, due autumn 2003, of the clinical and cost effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.

Announced that the NSF for long term conditions is expected to develop standards of care for specific neurological conditions, including epilepsy. The NSF is currently planned for publication in 2004 and implementation is expected to start from 2005.

Developed the expert patients programme, which aims to provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase will include people with epilepsy.

Provided funding to the Joint Epilepsy Council (JEC) to develop its *National Statement of Good Practice for the Treatment and Care of People who have Epilepsy*, which was published in May 2002. The statement makes a series of recommendations for good quality epilepsy services. It is intended to facilitate commissioning and will be of use to NHS purchasers, providers and service users.

Provided funding to the National Society for Epilepsy for its *Living Well* Project. The project aims to promote independent living by providing locally based short-term courses for people with epilepsy to develop self-help and self-management techniques.

Local health and social care organisations are responsible for planning and providing services for people with epilepsy, including the frequency of contact. The recently announced budget settlements for the NHS, representing an annual average increase of 7.5 per cent. above inflation over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08, and personal social services (PSS), representing an annual average increase of 6.0 per cent. above inflation over the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06, will provide the investment needed to support the services which best meet patients' and users' needs.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to train and promote *(a)* neurologists and *(b)* nurses with specialism in epilepsy. [72660]

Jacqui Smith: In the 2002 budget the Government set a target of recruiting 35,000 nurses, 15,000 doctors and 35,000 scientists and therapists. They will become part of the continuing drive to recruit more health professionals for the National Health Service.

The Department fully supports the need for an increase in the number of neurologists. Recommendations by the medical workforce review team are for the numbers of consultants in neurology to grow by some 50 per cent. by 2010, from 326 in 2001 to 496 in 2010, and some of those consultants may choose to specialise in epilepsy.

There are already about 100 epilepsy specialist nursing posts which have been developed in both hospital and community settings. Primary care trusts will be able to decide about the level of future demand in this area. They are best placed to understand local health needs and commission services to meet them.

Autism

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of recent research into the measles virus and the spinal fluid of autistic children; if he will commission further research into this issue; and if he will make a statement. [72183]

Ms Blears: All scientists who feel they have some important research findings should publish their work in a peer-review journal and subject it to scrutiny by fellow scientists. The Government are not aware that this study has been published and therefore are unable to make any assessment or commission any further research.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on research into autism since 1997; and what plans he has to increase money into research. [72532]

Jacqui Smith: The Medical Research Council (MRC) (which is a non-departmental public body which receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Trade and Industry via the Office of Science and Technology) is the main public sector body which funds research into autism. The MRC spend on autism since 1997 has been:

1997–98	£905,000
1998–99	£1,041,000
1999–2000	£1,114,000
2000–01	£1,182,000
2001–02	£1,372,000

I announced on 14 February the allocation of a further £2.5 million to the MRC for autism research. This will complement and add to the MRC's current support for research in this field. The MRC welcomes high quality applications for support in any scientific area which will further our understanding of autism, and especially those areas which were highlighted in their review.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent in the NHS on the treatment of autism in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what plans he has to increase the level of services available. [72531]

Jacqui Smith: National Health Service expenditure on the treatment of autism is not separately identified. Our increased investment in health, education and personal social services in England will benefit people with autism. It is for health authorities, in partnership with primary care trusts and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance his Department has given to *(a)* the Scottish Society for Autism and *(b)* other organisations helping people with autism in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [72533]

Jacqui Smith: Under the Section 64 General Scheme of Grants to Voluntary Organisations, the Department issues funds to further its objectives in the health and social care fields in England. We have not funded the Scottish Society for Autism. Three national autistic society projects have received funding in the last 12 months:

Project	*Amount*
Independence and Autism: Good Practice for Service Providers	£49,000
Help—Parental Training	£46,000
Asperger's Syndrome Project	£40,000

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of recent research into the impact on autistic children of a second dose of MMR. [72184]

Ms Blears: We are not aware of any systematic study looking at whether a second dose of MMR has an impact on the rate of autism in children. However, in a recent paper by Farrington et al (2001) (full reference below) they looked at regression in children with autism and found no relationship to either the first or second dose of MMR. This paper was published in a peer review journal.

Full reference—Farrington CP, Miller E. and Taylor B. MMR. and autism: further evidence against a causal association. Vaccine 19 (2001) 3632–3635. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Sport

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement about funding that his Department makes available for sports projects which improve public health; [72237]

(2) if he will make a statement on the role of sport and physical recreation within plans to improve public health; [72238]

(3) what guidance is available to primary care trusts on developing partnerships with sport and recreation bodies; and if he will encourage the formation of such partnerships. [72236]

Ms Blears: Increasing participation in sport and physical recreation has an important role to play in raising the rates of physical activity and improving public health. The importance of physical activity is recognised in the NHS Plan and national service frameworks. The national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease (CHD) requires the National Health Service, working closely with local authorities, to develop local programmes of effective policies on increasing physical activity.

The Health Development Agency has issued guidance to support the preventive aspects of the NSF for CHD. The document contained examples of effective interventions and set out who should be involved in the development of these programmes, including sport and leisure partners. Last year, we also published a national quality assurance framework for exercise referral systems. These schemes rely on close liaison and partnership working between health and leisure professionals.

We recently announced the launch of a new £2.5 million programme on exercise, which is being developed with Sport England and the Countryside Agency. The work forms part of a partnership between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health. The money will be used to set up nine pilots, based in neighbourhood renewal areas, which will test out different community approaches, including sports and active recreation projects, to increasing physical activity.

Mount Vernon Hospital

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve the provision of services at Mount Vernon Hospital. [48906]

Mr. Hutton: The Hillingdon Hospital National Health Service Trust has invested £200,000 in ward staff since assuming responsibility for services at Mount Vernon in 1999.

The Trust has employed additional registered medical officers to ensure 24-hour cover. Additional nursing staff have been recruited. A dedicated urology staff grade nurse works at Mount Vernon holding additional clinics and operating lists weekly. The trust has appointed an additional orthopaedic surgeon and a general surgeon during the last year to work mainly on the Mount Vernon site. All Hillingdon surgical and orthopaedic consultants have an outpatient session and at least one operating session at Mount Vernon.

The trust has invested £120,000 in a laminar air-flow system for the orthopaedic theatre to minimise the risk of infection and has invested £100,000 in new instrumentation.

Two additional linacs are to be commissioned at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre in July 2002, and one replacement and two additional linacs are planned over the next two to three years. Two linacs commissioned this year will cost in the region of £1.67 million, excluding accommodation costs. The three further linacs will cost approximately £3 million again excluding accommodation costs. Further investment is planned to maintain the fabric of the building and for equipment replacement as it reaches the end of useful life.

Rehabilitation

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rehabilitation services are offered to former coalminers and steelworkers in South Yorkshire. [56936]

Jacqui Smith: Due to the prevalence of respiratory and other industrial related diseases in the South Yorkshire population, local health services have increased contact with such diseases. Practitioners therefore have a heightened awareness of the symptoms of such diseases and are able to treat and refer to specialist care where appropriate.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee on the action programme on rare diseases in the framework of the action plan for public health is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57472]

Ms Blears: The Programme of Community Action on Rare Diseases was set up in accordance with Article 5(2) of Decision 1295–1299/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 1999.

The aim of the programme is to contribute, in coordination with other community measures, towards ensuring a high level of health protection in relation to rare diseases by improving knowledge, for example by promoting the setting-up of a coherent and complementary European information network on rare diseases, and facilitating access to information about these diseases, in particular for health professionals, researchers and those affected directly or indirectly by these diseases, by encouraging and strengthening transnational cooperation between voluntary and professional support groups for those concerned, and by ensuring optimimum handling of clusters and by promoting the surveillance of rare diseases.

The Committee consists of two representatives from each Member State, although both do not always attend. The Committee is chaired by the Commission. The Committee is required to deliver its opinion on draft measures submitted to it by the Commission.

The Committee has met twice in the last 12 months.

Costs to public funds were minimal, meetings last one day, the commission pay the travel costs of nominated representatives, UK Departments are required to pay subsistence and UK travel costs.

Details about the Committee, the programme and funded projects can be found on Europa, the EU on-line website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/index en.html

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

"simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Decision to set up a network for

the epidemiological surveillance and control of communicable diseases is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57473]

Ms Blears: The Committee for the European Network for the Epidemiological Surveillance and Control of Communicable Diseases was set up in accordance with Article 7 of Decision 2119/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council setting up the Network, for the purposes of implementing the Decision.

The Committee consists of two representatives from each Member State: one representing the competent public health authority and the other the national body with responsibility for surveillance of communicable diseases. For the UK, this comprises representatives from the Department of Health and the Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre. The Committee is chaired by the Commission. The Committee is required to deliver its opinion on draft measures submitted to it by the Commission.

The Committee has met four times in the last 12 months.

Costs to public funds were minimal, meetings last one day, the commission pay the travel costs of nominated representatives, UK Departments are required to pay subsistence and UK travel costs.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

"simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

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Products of Animal Origin

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had concerning the European Commission's draft regulation on official controls on Products of Animal Origin; and if he will make a statement. [62097]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* The European Commission's proposal for a Regulation on official controls on products of animal origin is currently under discussion. The first meeting in Council Working Group took place between 23 and 24 July 2002. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is leading negotiations on behalf of the UK. The FSA will be writing to stakeholders to advise them of the issues arising following this meeting and a copy of this letter will be placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for North Norfolk will receive a reply to his letter to the Chairman of the Food Standards Agency dated 30 January. [62087]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* I replied to the hon. Member on 24 June 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 3 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A. Starkie. [66208]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 3 July at column 451W.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) dated 4 February and 22 April to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears); and what the reason is for the delay in replying. [69458]

Mr. Lammy: Replies were sent on 16 July and 6 August. The issues raised in the hon. Member's correspondence were of a complex nature and required liasing with third parties to provide information.

Frictional Discharge

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, when he expects only frictional levels of delayed discharge to be achieved; [64523]

(2) how many people he estimates have experienced frictional discharge for each quarter of the last year; and how many he expects to experience frictional discharge in the next year. [64668]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* The Government's target is to end widespread delayed discharges by 2004.

The Government are determined to continue to make reducing delayed discharge a priority area. This is the key to getting the right care, in the right place, at the right time for all patients. Under this year's budget, overall social services funding will increase by six per cent. and we intend to bring forward legislation to ensure that good partnership working between the National Health Service and local authority social services reduces the number of delays even further.

Wanless Report

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken to implement the recommendations of the Wanless report. [64548]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement on 17 April 2002 announced unprecedented annual average increases for the National Health Service in England of 7.3 per cent. per annum over five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08, on the basis of stage 1 resource budgeting. This is the level of increase recommended by the Wanless report under its "fully engaged" scenario. We are currently considering how best to take forward the other recommendations of the Wanless report.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to undertake further work as part of a whole systems approach to analysing and modelling health and social care as set out in the Wanless report, paragraph 1.12. [65144]

Jacqui Smith: Further requirements for analysis will be considered as part of the normal process of policy development.

Diagnostic and Treatment Centres

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if a hospital previously scheduled to be built under a PFI scheme will be eligible to apply for partial funding under the diagnostic and treatment centre funding programme. [66826]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to an ambitious programme of new Diagnosis and Treatment Centres (DTCs). Some are on course to be developed as part of PFI projects, others through the use of public capital. We expect local National Health Service authorities to develop proposals based on sources of funding which offer the best value for money and speed of implementation. The ability to provide public funding for a part of a PFI scheme will depend on the degree of separability (and inter-dependence) of the DTC elements from the rest of the scheme.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the smallpox contract awarded to Powderject and supplied by Bavarian Nordic is to be subcontracted to IDT. [67557]

Mr. Hutton: The contract has been awarded to PowderJect. Therefore, PowderJect is responsible for the supply of properly manufactured vaccine that meets our specific requirements.

Under the terms of this contract, the smallpox vaccine will be manufactured in Germany by Impfstoffwerke Dessau Tornav GmbH (IDT).

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long he estimates it would have taken to complete the tendering process for the smallpox vaccine order if the usual tendering process had been used. [67548]

Mr. Hutton: If the usual open tendering processes had been used for the procurement of smallpox vaccine, the complete process is likely to have taken as long as four to five months to complete. Potential suppliers must first submit an expression of interest in response to the 37-day advertisement in the *Official Journal* of European Communities and must accompany that expression with evidence requested by the contracting organisation. From those who satisfy this first stage, tenders would be invited from some or all, and a period of 40 days is usually allowed for potential bidders to submit bids. There then follows a period during which the tenders are evaluated, terms agreed and a contract is prepared.

Public Consultations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69801]

Mr. Lammy: Data are only available from 2001 onwards. All consultation material is available ion printed form by request to the Department and all consultations are posted on the Department's website. Details of the consultations undertaken since 2001 were provided in the answer give to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on Tuesday 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1096W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since 8 June 2001, indicating the *(a)* length and *(b)* number of responses received in each case. [68706]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the response given to the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on Tuesday 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1096W.

Finished Consultant Episodes

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the underlying reasons are for the change in the number of finished consultant episodes between 1997 and 2001 for the treatment of *(a)* malignant neoplasm of lip, *(b)* Kaposi's sarcoma, *(c)* leukaemias of specified and unspecified cell types, *(d)* carcinoma in situ of cervix uteri, *(e)* benign neoplasm of mouth and pharynx and *(f)* benign neoplasm of bone and articular cartilage; and if he will make a statement. [67868]

Ms Blears: The figures for finished consultant episodes in 1996–97 and 2000–01 are shown in the table. The hospital episode statistics database does not hold any information on underlying reasons for the change in figures.

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) by main diagnosis NHS Hospitals, England 1996–97 and 2000–01

	1996–97	*2000–2001*
Malignant neoplasm of lip	448	399
Kaposi's sarcoma	172	81
Leukaemias of specified and unspecified cell types	1,421	1,109
Carcinoma in situ of cervix uteri	13,955	10,835
Benign neoplasm of mouth and pharynx	2,531	2,429
Benign neoplasm of bone and articular cartridge	2,134	2,054

Notes:

An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

The primary diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

Data for 1996–97 are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data; 2000–01 figures are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

UK Clinical Products Reference Source

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to put out to tender the maintenance of the UK Clinical Products Reference Source. [67993]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* The UK Standard Clinical Products Reference Source will comprise four distinct elements. Of these, two are already in production: The SNOMED CT drug core, under the terms of the contract between the Department and the College of American Pathologists, and the primary care drug dictionary, on behalf of the Department by the prescription pricing authority.

The remaining two elements are the secondary care drug dictionary and the medical devices dictionary. I can confirm that the maintenance of both these dictionaries will be undertaken in accordance with public procurement European Union and *Official Journal* of the European Communities regulations and with the National Health Service information authority's procedures for the letting of contracts.

NHS IT Procurement

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69307]

Ms Blears: The Department does not deploy open source software on its information technology network and the current policy is not to use open source software.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to require NHS trusts in the Eastern region to follow the south-west NHS IT procurement model. [73126]

Mr. Lammy: The organisations in the former eastern region will be expected to follow the procurement process agreed as part of the national implementation programme for information technology in the National Health Service, announced in June 2002.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to introduce a single procurement process for electronic patient record systems for the Thames Valley, Kent and Birmingham area NHS trusts. [73127]

Mr. Lammy: The organisations in Thames Valley, Kent and Birmingham will be expected to follow the procurement process agreed as part of the national implementation programme for information technology in the National Health Service, announced by Ministers in June 2002.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS Executive officials directly involved in the establishment of single procurement arrangements for NHS trusts in the south-west were previously involved in *(a)* development and *(b)* management of the Hospital Information Support Systems initiative. [73129]

Mr. Lammy: One Departmental official, previously involved with the hospital information support systems initiative, was involved in the initiation of the south west regional procurement process. This official played no part in the project team, and left the project at the time the Official Journal of the European Commission was published. The south west regional procurement process has been run by National Health Service staff, with a project support office hosted by a health authority.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he will take to ensure the fairness and transparency of the procurement processes to be used in implementation of the new NHS ICT strategy; [67998]

(2) whose responsibility it will be to *(a)* choose and *(b)* enter into contracts with specific application suppliers from the accredited lists of the new NHS ICT programme; and if he will make a statement as to his Department's involvement in such decisions; [67991]

(3) by what process NHS ICT suppliers will be shortlisted nationally for accreditation; [67984]

(4) what progress has been made concerning the short list of prime contractors to implement the new NHS ICT programme; [67988]

(5) what procurement processes will be used for the implementation of the new NHS ICT strategy; [67985]

(6) what role value for money will play in choosing ICT preferred suppliers to implement the new NHS ICT strategy. [67989]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* We are currently developing with colleagues in the National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency a procurement strategy to facilitate the acquisition of the necessary goods and services to support "Delivering 21 Century IT" for the NHS. We will publish outline details of the new procurement strategy in the near future.

Procurements are underway in many parts of the country to deliver electronic patient records and other systems and these procurements need to proceed. All public sector procurements have to follow the principle of best value, rather than cheapest price.

Strict rules govern the procurement of goods and services for the public services, including rules published in European Union Directives, by Her Majesty's Treasury and the Department. These will be adhered to adhered to in all cases.

Sausage Casings

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the impact on costs to the sausage industry of a ban on the use of natural sausage casings; [68494]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on the cost base of British abattoirs of a ban on the use of natural sausage casings. [68493]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that the basis of their recommendation to the European Commission that sheep intestine be banned as specified risk material is outlined in a report compiled by a group of stakeholders endorsed by the board of the FSA on 13 June 2002. The report considers the potential risk reduction, costs and practicability of a range of further precautionary measures against the theoretical risk of BSE in sheep. Estimates provided by the Meat and Livestock Commission, one of the stakeholders on the group, indicate that the turnover of the sheep sausage casings sector is £24 million per annum, and that the loss of income to licensed abattoirs from the sales of sheep intestine to the sausage casings industry would be approximately £6.5 million per annum. No analysis has been made of the compensating increase

in turnover for other suppliers that could arise if other sausage casings were to be substituted for those made from sheep intestines.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the traceability of natural sausage casings imported into the EU from third countries. [68496]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that all imports of meat and meat products from third countries must come from establishments which are approved or authorised by the European Commission and which satisfy the health conditions set out in the relevant EC legislation.

Third country imports must enter the European Union through a designated border inspection post, where they are subject to documentary and physical checks. Consignments must be accompanied by commercial documentation indicating the nature of the product, and the name and identification number of the originating plant. EU establishments receiving consignments of products such as natural animal casings are required to keep the accompanying commercial documents for at least one year after receipt and make them available on request to the enforcement authority.

These arrangements provide traceability of a consignment of natural animal casings back to the plant of origin.

In addition, meat and meat products containing sheep material imported from third countries must be accompanied by a veterinary declaration certifying that the product does not contain, nor is it derived from, specified risk material.

Fat Content (Menus)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for issuing regulations on guidance on fat content on menus in restaurants in the UK in a similar way to that on food bought in supermarkets. [71568]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* I have no such plans. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is exploring practical ways to help those who wish to choose a healthy diet to select appropriate options when eating out. The FSA has commissioned the British Nutrition Foundation to examine practice in other countries and relevant research, and to identify actions it might take. The FSA plans to publish the report of this study and discuss the recommendations it makes in detail with interested parties later this year.

Food

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to improve access to fresh and affordable food and produce in the most socially deprived communities. [68343]

Ms Blears: We have in place major programmes to tackle the inequalities that exist in access to healthy food. This includes a Welfare Food Scheme that provides milk for low-income families and a Five-a-Day Programme to increase access to, and availability of fruit and vegetables. Following a successful pilots stage, the new opportunities fund is providing £10 million to set up sixty-six Five-a-day community programmes led by primary care trusts based in deprived areas. A further £42 million is being invested to extend the National School Fruit Scheme to cover over 1 million children from 2002 to 2004.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has carried out on the effects of *(a)* salt and *(b)* fat in the diet of (i) pre-school and (ii) school age children. [71122]

Ms Blears: The Department has not funded research specifically on the effects of salt and fat in the diet of pre-school and school aged children. However a range of projects has been funded looking at the influence of children's eating habits and other childhood factors impacting on health in later life, such as in the development of adult obesity. The Government have also commissioned national diet and nutrition surveys (NDNS) which provide information on the diet, individual nutrient intakes and nutritional status of the population including pre-school and school aged children. The NDNS for children aged one and a half to four and a half years was published in 1995 and the survey on young people aged four to eighteen years in 2000. Copies are available in the Library.

We are committed in the NHS Plan to working with the Food Standards Agency and the food industry to improve the overall balance of the diet including reductions in the salt, fat and sugar content of processed foods.

Food Safety

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the advice of the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, issued in MAFF News Release 83/97 and in MAFF Food Safety Information Bulletin December 1998, on preparation of fruit and vegetables for small children, has been revoked; and what his Department's policy is on the advice of the Food Standards Agency that fruit and vegetables do not need to be peeled before being given to young children in order to reduce pesticide residues. [71494]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has advised that washing or peeling fruit and vegetables is not required as a protection against pesticide residues (issued on the FSA's website, *www.food.gov.uk,* on 26 March 2002). However, the FSA continues to advise that it is sensible to wash fruit and vegetables before eating for reasons of general food hygiene.

This follows the FSA's request to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) to reconsider the then Deputy Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) advice to consumers about washing and peeling fruit and vegetables in relation to pesticide residues. The ACP assured the Agency and the Department that there are no active substances currently in use where an assumption about the need for washing and peeling was made as part of their approval. The ACP concluded that washing or peeling fruit and vegetables is not required as a protection against pesticide residues and this effectively supersedes the old advice.

The FSA's advice is that when pesticide residues are found in fruit and vegetables, in the vast majority of cases they do not give rise to any health concerns. Where, very occasionally a residue is found which could lead to the

acceptable daily intake for the pesticide concerned being exceeded the FSA demands immediate action to remove that risk.

Obesity

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he plans to reduce levels of childhood obesity. [72044]

Ms Blears: Both physical activity and eating habits play a role in overweight and obesity. We have put in place major cross-government programmes of work to ensure that children have access to a healthy diet, and have opportunities to be physically active. This includes £581 million from the new opportunities fund for a new physical education (PE) and sports programme and £42 million to extend the National School Fruit Scheme.

The national healthy school standard, part of the healthy school programme, contains a set of criteria relating to physical activity, and also supports the two hours PE entitlement announced in January 2001. £120 million will support the school sport co-ordinator programme, setting up a network of 1,000 co-ordinators.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are in place to raise awareness about the problem of obesity; what recent representations he has received about obesity; and if he will make a statement. [68995]

Ms Blears: There are a variety of programmes on promoting healthy eating and physical activity, and reducing overweight and obesity which are being developed as part of the national service framework for coronary heart disease. This includes local Five-a-Day community initiatives, based in deprived areas, which provide education about the health benefits of fruit and vegetables, as well as improved access and availability. To increase awareness of the importance of diet and exercise among children, we have a healthy schools programme that aims to promote better health for all children and young people through education on a range of issues.

The Government also acknowledge the setting up of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Obesity, which will increase political and wider public attention to the issue. There are other organisations and charities such as the British dietetic association, the obesity awareness and solutions trust and weight concern who are raising awareness about the problem of obesity and are supported through the Department's Section 64 Grant Scheme.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the accuracy of using ICD 10 codes to record traumatic brain injury in hospital accident and emergency departments; and if he will make a statement. [68874]

Mr. Lammy: The accident and emergency departments rarely use ICD-10 to record patients. The ICD-10 codes are generally used for admitted patients (either in-patients or day cases) The codes within ICD-10 for traumatic brain injury would be: an unspecified brain injury is S06.9 Intracranial injury, unspecified.

However there are other codes encompassing brain injuries:

S06.—Intracranial injury

S09.7 Multiple injuries of head

T06.0 Injuries of brain and cranial nerves with injuries of nerves and spinal cord at neck level

Newborn Hearing Screening Programme

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which sites have been selected for the second phase of the newborn hearing screening programme; and how he intends to publicise them. [68929]

Jacqui Smith: The final detail for the second phase of the newborn hearing screening programme is near to agreement. Once this has been agreed the sites will be informed. Full details of the sites will be available on the National Screening Committee's website.

Child Protection

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider proposals from the NSPCC for the creation of a child safeguarding board and the establishment of multi-agency child safeguarding teams to increase the effectiveness of professionals working together. [72908]

Jacqui Smith: Evidence and submissions relating to issues raised by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children campaign have been heard by the Victoria Climbié Inquiry. The Government expect to receive the Inquiry's report later this year. The Inquiry's recommendations, will be given full and proper consideration by the Government.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been given to the child protection system in each year since 1997. [72910]

Jacqui Smith: It is for individual councils with social services responsibilities and National Health Service bodies to decide, in the light of their priorities, how much to spend on child protection services. Other statutory agencies, such as the police and education services, also commit resources to meeting their child protection responsibilities, while a number of voluntary organisations also provide child protection services.

However between 1996–97 and 2002–03 the Government increased social services funding by more than 20 per cent. in real terms and will make further annual average real terms increases available of 6 per cent. between 2003–04 and 2005–06.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Government have taken *(a)* to make it easier for children to report abuse and neglect and *(b)* to raise public awareness of child abuse. [72911]

Jacqui Smith: The Government have revised and widely distributed their child protection guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children.* This document sets out how all agencies and professionals should work together to promote children's welfare and protect them from abuse and neglect. It is addressed to those who work in the health and education services, the police, social services, the probation service, and others whose work brings them into contact with children and families. All

those who work with children and families are expected to retain a clear focus on the welfare of the child and be alert to, and know how to respond quickly and decisively to, potential indicators of abuse and neglect. This greater awareness should make it easier for children to be heard when they report abuse and neglect.

In addition, a range of new mechanisms have been introduced that make it easier for children to report abuse and neglect. These include:

the appointment of the first ever Children's Rights Director for England—Roger Morgan—to act as a powerful champion for some of the most vulnerable children in our country, and to monitor and review the effectiveness of the arrangements in relation to dealing with complaints and representations made by, or on behalf of, children about regulated children's services.

the Education Act 2002, which places a statutory requirement on Local Education Authorities and the governing bodies of schools and further education institutions to have arrangements to ensure that their functions are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and to have regard to guidance issued by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State when drawing up those arrangements. These new duties will reinforce schools' responsibility to have effective arrangements for identifying and responding to signs of neglect and abuse.

the participation of children and young people in day to day decision making as a key principle underpinning the Government's *Quality Protects* Programme. Objective 8 of the Government's objectives for children's social services says that local authorities should enhance the involvement of young people in the planning and delivery of services, and in decisions which affect their daily lives, including giving children and young people access to independent advocacy services and mechanisms for speeding up the complaints procedure.

The Government are also providing funding to ChildLine, which was established to listen to children and young people and to offer them counselling, information, support and protection.

Area child protection committees are responsible for deciding what child protection information and advice to make available to members of their local community. However, leaflets advising adults what to do when they have concerns about the welfare of a child or that a child may be suffering, or at risk of suffering, abuse or neglect have also been produced on a national basis by a number of voluntary organisations. These include the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's *Handle with Care* (about the dangers of shaking babies) and *Partners in Protecting Children*. In addition, there are a number of leaflets which provide advice to children, such as Kidscape's *Stop Bullying and You Can Beat Bullying*.

Care Standards Act

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions of the Care Stadards Act 2000 have come into force; and when the other parts will come into force. [69421]

Jacqui Smith: The majority of the Care Standards Act has already come into force. The details are set out in The Care Standards Act 2000 (Commencement No. 15 (England) and Transitional Provisions) (Amendment) Order 2002 (SI 2002 No. 1790 (C.55)).

The main provisions which have yet to come into force are those in Part VII of the Act which place a duty on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to keep a list of individuals who are considered to be unsuitable to work with vulnerable adults. This is due to be brought into force in January 2003.

Certain provisions in Part IV of the Act concerning the registration and training of social workers have yet to come into force. They are due to come into force before 1 April 2003.

There are also provisions in the Act to extend certain provisions to other services and establishments. These will only be activated when it is considered to be appropriate and there is no fixed timescale for bringing them into force.

Housing Tsar

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many low-cost housing units for nurses in London have been found by the Department's housing tsar; and how many are now occupied by nurses. [68160]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The National Health Service housing co-ordinator was appointed by NHS Estates in April 2000. He has a target of facilitating access to an additional 2,000 units of affordable accommodation for nurses in London by July 2003 either by directly contracting or assisting NHS trusts in negotiations. The current position is that agreements have been reached for 1997 additional units. Of this figure, 1051 are available but 389 units have only recently been opened and occupancy is being built up.

The Department's housing co-ordinator has also been directly involved in negotiating 50 per cent. of the total starter home initiative budget allocation. This should enable approximately 5,000 staff NHS staff to gain a foothold on the property ladder by 2004. Assistance is in the form of equity loans, interest free loans and shared ownership.

[This information is correct as at Friday 2 August 2002]

Primary Care Trusts

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are issued to primary care trusts about the employment of officers responsible for establishing PFI initiatives. [70049]

Mr. Hutton: The Department issued guidance in 1999 under *"Public Private Partnerships in the National Health Service: The Private Finance Initiative—Good Practice"*. This contains specific instructions for all National Health Service trusts for appointing a project director, his team and their roles and responsibilities.

Pesticides

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is the aim of his Department to encourage ways of improving the use of pesticides to minimise residues to the extent that they are not detectable at the point of sale. [70141]

Ms Blears: The Department have consulted the Food Standards Agency which has provided the following response.

The Agency acknowledges that consumers want food which contains a minimum of pesticide residues even though the authorisation system sets limits for residues in food which protect human health. The Agency is currently drawing up an action plan with the aim of encouraging ways of improving the use of pesticides to minimise residues.

Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answers of 25 April 2002 and 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 461W and 571W, if he will reconcile the statement that his Department does not collect statistics on the incidence of individual conditions with the statement that his Department collects and uses a wide range of data on morbidity according to the condition of interest and the context of the question to be answered; and if he will collect statistics on Duchenne muscular dystrophy. [70396]

Jacqui Smith: As the response to my hon. Friend on 4 July, *Official Report*, column 571W states, we do have information on a wide range of conditions, in particular for deaths and hospital admissions which are coded accorded to the international classification of diseases in line with practice in other countries. These can answer many questions, but where there is not a specific code for the condition this is not possible. In the case of Duchenne muscular dystrophy this is included within an overall code for muscular dystrophy and is therefore not separately identifiable. We have no plans for collecting separate data in this area.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on pollution-related diseases in the framework of the action plan for public health is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70603]

Ms Blears: The European Commission has not yet notified members of the European Union Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on pollution-related diseases of the date of the next meeting.

It is the role of Departmental officials to represent the whole of the United Kingdom at this committee. In framing of all EU policy, the Department consults fully with all the devolved authorities, including the Scottish Executive, to ensure that such representation reflects all parts of the UK.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee for the implementation of the Community action plan to combat cancer is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70566]

Ms Blears: The extended Europe against cancer (EAC) programme will come to an end on 31 December 2002. The programme has a management committee made up of representatives from each Member State and it is for the United Kingdom to decide on who to delegate to represent the UK. The Scottish Executive are regularly consulted on, and is involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of European Union policy which touch on matters which fall within its the responsibilities. Following the successful outcome of the recent conciliation exercise, a new EU public health action programme will start in 2003.

0870 Numbers

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1205W, for what types of purposes 0870 numbers are used; and what level of payment is judged to be suitable. [71128]

Mr. Lammy: The Department manages one 0870 line, this being the NHS Responseline. This line was introduced by the NHS Executive in April 1997 to provide a service to the National Health Service to call and place orders for delivery of Departmental publications within 48 hours.

This line is charged at the national standard call rates set by Cable and Wireless.

Ambulance Services

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which ambulance trusts train their ambulance staff in obstetrics and gynaecological care. [70729]

Mr. Lammy: Qualified emergency ambulance staff in every ambulance trust are trained to a national curriculum and operate to national clinical guidelines that include the management of obstetric and gynaecological care.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to introduce the provision of stab- and bullet-proof vests to ambulance services outside London. [71080]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* There are no national plans to introduce the provision of light-weight anti-stab vests or bullet-proof vests for frontline ambulance personnel. The use of anti-stab vests or bullet-proof vests is something local managers in ambulance trusts need to consider after undertaking a thorough assessment of the risk faced by their staff, and the need for this type of protective wear.

The London Ambulance National Health Service Trust has recently piloted the use of anti-stab vests at two ambulance stations. The evaluation of the pilots was positive, and this information is being shared with all other NHS ambulance trusts.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths resulted from the failure of ambulances to arrive at their destinations on 17 and 18 July *(a)* this year and *(b)* 2001. [73026]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not collected.

All ambulance services will always reach the scene of an emergency call, although different traffic conditions will have an impact on the response time.

Priority Setting

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, ref. 68313, how

many priorities were set in the 2002–03 planning and priorities framework; and how many were set in 2001–02. [71594]

Mr. Lammy: There were three major priorities set for the National Health Service in the 2002–03 Planning and Priorities Framework. They were:

delivering emergency services when and where they are needed;

reducing waiting times and delays throughout the system; and

improving quality of service and outcomes in clinical priority areas of cancer, heart disease, mental health and services for older people.

These priorities were underpinned by 32 actions, compared with 108 issued in the previous year.

Post Mortems

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many post mortems took place in each of the last five years. [71154]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The number of post mortems carried out in England and Wales in the last five years is shown in the table.

(000s)	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Hospital post mortems[1]	3.1	3.5	3.5	N/A	N/A
Coroner's post mortems[2]	123.0	124.4	124.8	124.5	121.1
Total	126.1	127.9	128.3		

[1] Series DH1: Mortality Statistics general. Review of the Registrar General on deaths in England and Wales.
[2] Home Office Statistical Bulletin (annual): Deaths reported to Coroners, copies of which are in the Library.

Statutory Instruments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by his Department since 1 January. [71043]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Information relating to the number of statutory instruments made by the Department since 1 January 2002 has been placed in the Library.

Community Hospital (Malvern)

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of the proposed community hospital at Seaford Court in Malvern. [70791]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust is currently considering the business plan for the development of the proposed new unit at Seaford Court. These will be reviewed over the coming weeks, culminating in a discussion at the joint professional executive committee board meeting on 4 September.

[This information is correct as at Friday, 2 August 2002]

Cancer

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to investigate cancer rates at Burnham-on-Sea. [71553]

Ms Blears: The Department is aware of the recent survey by green audit of cancer in Burnham-on Sea, however, it has not been provided with details of the results of the survey. Government are advised on cancer clusters near to nuclear installations by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) which was set up in 1985. This committee is carrying out a very large study of childhood cancer in Great Britain which includes all cases registered since the 1960's (some 33,000 cases). This study is expected to report in 2003 and will include areas around all nuclear installations in Great Britain including Burnham-on Sea. The Government are considering a feasibility study by the small area health statistics unit (SAHSU) of all adult cancers in the areas around nuclear power installations in Great Britain.

Social Workers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the vacancy rates are for social workers in each local authority in England at the latest date for which figures are available. [71106]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* Information on vacancy rates for social workers is not available centrally.

Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which coastal shellfisheries the Food Standards Agency has divided the area into zones for the purpose of testing for diarrhetic shellfish poisoning. [71810]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency having considered expert advice has divided four shellfish production areas, the Solent, the Wash, West Mersea, and the Thames estuary, into zones as a result of presence of diarrhetic shellfish poisoning.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Food Standards Agency will divide the Burry Inlet Shellfishery into zones to permit cockle gathering in the parts of the estuary testing free of diarrhetic shellfish poisoning. [71811]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has recently reviewed whether it would be possible to divide the Burry Inlet into zones in order to permit cockles to be gathered in parts of the estuary. Taking expert advice into account, the FSA does not currently consider the Burry Inlet to be suitable for dividing into zones at this time due a number of issues but primarily due to the erratic pattern of the results for the toxin detection on both sides of the Inlet. The FSA is keeping the situation in the Burry Inlet under review and will continue to liase with the local enforcement agencies and industry.

Wage Costs

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the difference in wage costs between Surrey and Durham. [71913]

Mr. Hutton: The weighted capitation formula used to calculate health authority target shares of National Health Service revenue allocations includes a staff market forces factor (MFF) that reflects geographical variations in staff costs. The staff MFF is based on the new earnings survey data set produced by the Office for National Statistics.

In the 2002–03 allocations formula the weighting factor used for Surrey was 1.15 and the weighting factor for Co. Durham was 1.00.

Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate his Department has made of the shortfall of *(a)* nurses, *(b)* general practitioners, *(c)* cancer specialists and *(d)* consultants in (i) the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority, (ii) Hampshire and (iii) the South East; and if he will make a statement; [72032]

(2) how many *(a)* mental health nurses and *(b)* doctors specialising in mental health care there were and what was the estimated shortfall in (i) mental health nurses and (ii) doctors specialising in mental health care in (A) the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority, (B) Hampshire and (C) the South East in each year since 1996; what the projected figures are for (1) 2002 and (2) 2003; and if he will make a statement. [72029]

Ms Blears: Information on vacancy rates has been collected in the National Health Service Vacancy Survey since 1999. Information, taken from the surveys for 1999 to 2002, has been placed in the Library. Details of shortfalls and projected vacancy rates are held at trust level and, therefore, are not available centrally.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much expenditure there was on mental health services in *(a)* the Isle of Wight, *(b)* Hampshire and *(c)* the South East in each year since 1996; what the projected expenditure is for (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003; and if he will make a statement. [72031]

Ms Blears: The information on expenditure on mental illness, not including primary care services for those with mental illness, for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 is shown in the table.

	Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority	*Hampshire*	*South East*
	£000	£000	£000
1996–97	36,312	89,118	412,979
1997–98	39,161	92,295	438,880
1998–99	39,084	96,686	463,522
1999–2000	44,276	113,129	524,989
2000–01	51,866	122,780	615,425

Notes:
Figures are secondary mental illness expenditure by the HA and for 2000–01 by PCTs.
Source:
Health authority audited accounts 1996–97 to 1998–99.
Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01.
Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01.

Information for 2001–02 is not held centrally nor is a projection on mental health spending for 2002–03.

Food Imports

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many tests have been carried out by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on imported foods and ingredients in each of the last five years, broken down by category; and what proportion of those tests identified unauthorised GMO samples. [71252]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Responsibility for tests on food imported direct to the United Kingdom from third countries rests with the port health authorities and local authorities which have responsibilities for port health work. Information on tests carried out on imported foods is not held centrally.

Cardiac Services

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's support for heart failure patients. [71657]

Ms Blears: Increased investment and sustained efforts from National Health Service staff in recent years means the NHS is delivering life saving treatment to more people more quickly. A greater number of lives are being saved from premature death through heart attacks. This means more people are surviving with weakened hearts which, with an ageing population, has resulted in a growing number of people living with heart failure.

The national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease recognised that there was more to be done to improve the care and quality of life that patients with heart failure experience, and to reduce the number of avoidable hospital admissions. As the early priorities for the NSF are now being delivered, heart failure is now a top priority for the next phase of delivery of the NSF.

The Department will be working in partnership with the British Heart Foundation, the NHS and other key players to ensure high quality care for these patients.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many heart failure patients there were in the UK in each of the last three years. [71658]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital admissions for Heart Failure (ICD-10 code 150), England, 1998–99 to 2000–01

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Hospital admissions for heart failure	82,382	80,055	74,441

Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics
Note:
The data shown represent the number of episodes that were the first in the spell of hospital in-patient treatment rather than a "count" of the number of patients.

These figures are for England only. Information for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the devolved administrations.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* patient groups, *(b)* doctors and *(c)* pharmarceutical company representatives on heart failure. [71659]

Ms Blears: Ministers recently met with the British Heart Foundation to discuss services for heart failure, and Departmental officials have been in discussion with a range of clinicians and pharmaceutical companies. In addition, an expert sub-group of the coronary heart disease taskforce which includes patient representatives has met to inform the development of policy and practice to implement the national service framework chapter on heart failure.

NICE

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he proposes to take to implement the Wanless report's recommendation that NICE, in conjunction with similar bodies in the devolved administrations, has a major role to play in examining older technologies and practices which may no longer be appropriate or cost effective. [71920]

Ms Blears: Proposals for achieving a broader selection of topics for guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, including older technologies which may no longer be appropriate or cost effective, were included in a consultation paper on timing and selection of topics for appraisal which we issued in March. We are now considering the response to this consultation and will announce our decisions later in the year.

European Medical Devices Directive

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 12 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1275W, on the European Medical Devices Directive, ref. 67637, when a response is expected; and if he will place a copy of the response in the Library. [71734]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The European Commission have indicated that they are not yet able to indicate when they will be in a position to send a formal reply to the Medical Devices Agency's letter but I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Drug Treatment Programmes

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the baseline is from which the target on increasing the participation of drug users in drug treatment programmes by 55 per cent. in the 2002 Public Service Agreement targets will be judged. [72262]

Ms Blears: The 2002 public services agreement targets were announced on the 15 July; the baseline from which the target on increasing the participation of problem drug users in drug treatment programmes by 55 per cent. by 2004 will be judged, will be fully outlined in the technical notes which are due to be published shortly.

Diabetes National Service Framework

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce how much extra funding from the health budget over the next five years will be allocated to funding the Diabetes National Service Framework. [72781]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) on 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1049W.

Lung Disease (Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of pulmonary rehabilitation services for lung disease sufferers in Sussex. [72481]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Information on the type and location of pulmonary rehabilitation services is not held centrally. It is for health authorities, in partnership with primary care trusts and National Health Service trusts, to ensure that patients have access to health services appropriate to their condition.

Abortion

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when questions on conscientious objection to abortion referral and contraceptive provision to under 16s were included in local audits of general practice; whom his Department consulted beforehand; and if he will make a statement. [72231]

Ms Blears: *Best Practice Guidance on the Provision of Effective Contraceptive and Advice Services for Young People* was issued to local teenage pregnancy co-ordinators in 2000. The Guidance is a specific action point of the Government's teenage pregnancy strategy and sets out the criteria by which contraceptive advice services should be commissioned and provided. This includes the provision of confidential contraceptive advice to under 16s within the established legal framework, the provision of early pregnancy testing and non-judgmental advice and, where abortion is the agreed course, quick referral to National Health Service funded abortion

services in line with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists evidence based guideline *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion (2000).*

In 2001 the teenage pregnancy unit provided an audit questionnaire for local areas to review community contraceptive services and general practice against the *Best Practice Guidance,* in order to identify gaps in provision and plan improvements. The majority of areas completed their general practice audits by March 2002.

The guidance and the audit questionnaire were developed in consultation with health professionals, including those representing general practice on the Government's independent advisory group on teenage pregnancy.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if it is his policy to respect the conscientious objections of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses to taking part in abortion operations; and if he will make a statement; [72241]

(2) what research his Department is undertaking into the conscientious objections of doctors taking part in abortion operations; and if he will make a statement. [72240]

Ms Blears: As part of work to improve access to sexual health services for young people, the teenage pregnancy unit has carried out an audit of services currently provided by general practice. This audit will provide an indication of the proportion of general practitioners, nationally and regionally, who have a conscientious objection to abortion, but does not extend to doctors working in hospitals. An analysis of the information provided by the audit will be made available on the teenage pregnancy unit website by the end of this year.

If medical or nursing staff have strong ethical or moral objections to treatment for termination of pregnancy, it is right that they should not be obliged to participate in this treatment. Their conscientious objection should not be detrimental to their careers and appointments. The exemption for conscientious objection under the Abortion Act 1967, as amended, does not extend to performing the preparatory steps to arrange an abortion, including referral to another doctor if appropriate, where the request meets legal requirements.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to enable a person born live but who was damaged during an abortion prior to 24 weeks gestation to secure compensation; and if he will make a statement. [72281]

Ms Blears: The Government have no plans to legislate on this issue.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' guideline *Termination of pregnancy for fetal abnormality in England, Wales and Scotland* (1996) and letter *Further issues relating to late abortion, fetal viability and registration of births and deaths* (April 2001) state that for all terminations at gestational age of more than twenty-one weeks and six days, which is the threshold of viability, the method chosen should ensure that the fetus is born dead.

All methods of first trimester abortion carry a low risk of failure to terminate the pregnancy, thus necessitating a further procedure. The Department is aware that a small number of women do decide to proceed with the pregnancy, after receiving advice on the possible effects of the treatment on the growing fetus. These women normally go on to deliver healthy babies.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out to test possible harm to the *(a)* physical and *(b)* psychological health of women which may be caused by the RU486 pill. [71478]

Ms Blears: All relevant evidence within the published literature has been reviewed in the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' evidence-based guideline *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion* (2000) and is referenced in the guideline. In general terms, the research shows no increased risk to the physical and psychological health of women having medical abortion compared to those having surgical abortion. Indeed, there appears to be a reduction in certain physical sequelae including infective sequelae.

Teenage Pregnancy

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of local audits of general practice, referred to in paragraph 5.33 of the Government response to the First Annual report of the Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy. [72242]

Ms Blears: We have commissioned from the teenage pregnancy strategy evaluation team a national and regional analysis of the local general practice audit returns.

The analysis is due to be completed by the end of the year and will be placed on the teenage pregnancy unit website and I will place a copy in the Library.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who his Department consulted before responding to the First Annual report on the Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy; and if he will make a statement. [72243]

Ms Blears: The independent advisory group on teenage pregnancy was established to provide advice to Government and monitor the success of the national teenage pregnancy strategy. The group includes a membership drawn from a wide range of individuals and organisations with experience of working with young people and teenage parents. The first annual report of the group set out forty-nine recommendations to Government on the further delivery of the national strategy. The Government response addresses these recommendations to set out a forward action plan for the next phase of delivery.

In addition to the independent advisory group, the teenage pregnancy unit has put in place arrangements to consult and involve the non-statutory sector, faith groups, relevant professional organisations, regional and local teenage pregnancy co-ordinators, young people and parents in tackling teenage pregnancy. The views of these

organisations and individuals were taken into account in developing the Government response.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the analysis of local audits of general practice referred to in paragraph 5.33 of the Government response to the First Annual report of the Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy indicates a change of their policy in respect to the right of conscientious objection by general practitioners to taking part in abortion operations; and if he will make a statement. [72233]

Ms Blears: The Government's position on conscientious objection to abortion remains unchanged. Section 4 of the Abortion Act 1967, as amended, provides that, except where treatment is necessary to save the life of or prevent grave permanent injury to the pregnant woman,

"no person shall be under any duty, whether by contract or by any statutory or other legal requirement, to participate in any treatment authorised by this Act to which he has a conscientious objection."

This exemption does not extend to giving advice, performing the preparatory steps to arrange an abortion where the request meets legal requirements and undertaking administration connected with abortion procedures. Doctors with a conscientious objection to abortion should make their views known to the patient and enable the patient to see another doctor without delay if that is the patient's wish.

The General Medical Council (GMC) booklet "Good Medical Practice" states that general practitioners' views about a patient's lifestyle or beliefs must not prejudice the treatment they provide or arrange. If they feel their beliefs might affect the treatment, this must be explained to the patient who should be told of their right to see another doctor. Breach of this guidance may expose a doctor to a charge of serious professional misconduct and disciplinary action by the GMC.

National PAP Screening Programme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of UK women participated in the National PAP Screening Programme, broken down by age groups *(a)* under 30, *(b)* 31 to 49, *(c)* 50 to 59 and *(d)* 60 to 64 years, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [72501]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The national computerised call/recall system for cervical screening was introduced in 1988. Women aged 20 to 64 are invited for a free cervical screening test every three to five years. Women over 65 are invited if their previous two tests were not clear or if they have never been screened.

The coverage of the screening programme is defined as the proportion of women aged 25–64, excluding those "recall ceased" for clinical reasons, who have had a test with a result at least once in the previous five years. The national target across the age range is 80 per cent.

The information requested is shown in the table.

Women screened by the NHS Cervical Screening Programme 1997–2001, England

England					*percentage*
Age at 31 March	*1997*[1]	*1998*[2]	*1999*[2]	*2000*[2]	*2001*[2]
under 30[3]	80.2	80.4	79.6	78.6	77.0
30–49	86.5	86.4	86.1	85.7	84.9
50–59	85.2	83.9	84.3	84.3	83.9
60–64	78.4	76.7	77.3	77.6	77.6

Source:
Department of Health Statistics Division 3G: Return
[1] Based on resident population less recall
[2] Based on resident population less recall ceased for clinical
[3] As women may be first called at any age between 20 and the coverage is calculated on women aged 25-

HPV Pilot Scheme

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people took part in the limited implementation HPV pilot scheme in *(a)* Newcastle, *(b)* North Bristol and *(c)* Norfolk and Norwich in (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03; what the percentage was of women with a borderline/mild abnormality; how much the pilot study has cost since its commencement; and if he will make a statement. [72498]

Ms. Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The human papilloma virus (HPV) pilots have been set up to assess the role that HPV testing may play in the triage of women with borderline and low-grade abnormalities.

Number of HPV tests: 2001–02

	Norfolk/Norwich	*Bristol*	*Newcastle*
Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)	2,700	2,200	3,248

The number of HPV tests will reduce in 2002–03 as HPV recruitment has ended. The outcome of the HPV pilots will be available to the Department in autumn 2003. The pilot study cost £1.1 million in 2001–02. Planned expenditure for 2002–03 is £1 million. It is estimated that the overall pilot will cost approximately £2.1 million. External quality assessment, laboratory and primary care training and central co-ordination will cost approximately £200,000–£250,000 for the duration of the pilot.

Smear Tests

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of smear tests in England and Wales resulted in women being recalled as a result of inadequate smears in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002; and if he will make a statement. [72500]

Ms. Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Three and a half million women aged 20–64 were tested for cervical cancer in 2000–01. 9.7 per cent. of smears were inadequate. Approximately 6.3 per cent. of women were recalled as a result of a previous inadequate smear.

Inadequate smears are tests that are not suitable for reporting for clinical or technical reasons. A proportion of inadequate smears is therefore unavoidable.

CT Scanners

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many business plans have been submitted from north-west based hospital trusts in respect of securing additional CT scanning equipment; when the criteria to determine the distribution of additional CT scanners will be decided; and when decisions on new scanner distributions will be made. [72601]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Some individual National Health Service trusts have submitted "cases of need" in relation to the national allocation of 50 additional computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners as outlined in the NHS Cancer Plan. However it is the responsibility of individual cancer networks in partnership with their health authorities to determine the degree of need for their respective populations with regard to access to CT and MRI scanners. There are three cancer networks in the north west, all whom are fully engaged in discussions with the Department and Directorate of Health and Social Care North in assessing the need for CT and MRI scanners.

One of the factors in establishing criteria for the allocation of additional equipment will be the relative provision of CT and MRI services to the population served, together with the efficient use of existing scanners.

We expect the criteria to be published during the summer, following consultation with the new health authorities.

Prompt Payment

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's record on the payment of bills on time over the last two years. [72229]

Mr. Lammy: The payment record of the Department of Health and its agencies is shown in the table.

	No of bills paid	*per cent. paid within 30 days or contract terms*
April 2000–March 2001	358,523	95.97
April 2001–March 2002	387,119	94.97

Newborn Screening

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department requires primary care trusts in areas where newborn screening has been or is being implemented to allocate necessary funding to enable the screening to continue after the central funding to set up the programme runs out. [72538]

Jacqui Smith: We would expect primary care trusts as part of their priority setting to maintain and improve their services from their overall allocations for 2003–04 and future years.

Second Opinion Appointed Doctors

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of second opinion appointed doctors under the Mental Health Act 1983. [72135]

Jacqui Smith: The role of the second opinion appointed doctor (SOAD) is to provide an additional safeguard to patient's rights. The Mental Health Act 1983 under Section 58 provides that certain forms of medical treatment for mental disorder[1] require either the patient's consent or a second opinion. In the absence of the patient's consent, and if the treatment falls within the provisions of Section 58, the doctor in charge of the patient's treatment will request a second opinion to certify the treatment proposed.

The SOAD must decide whether the patient is in fact refusing the treatment or incapable of making a decision on it and whether the treatment should be given. The SOAD acts as an individual and must come to his or her own independent opinion as to whether or not the treatment is a reasonable one.

In order to form his or her own opinion the SOAD is statutorily obliged to consult with a nurse and another non-nursing/medical professional, both of whom have been professionally concerned with the patient's medical treatment. The SOAD should also interview the patient in private and the doctor in charge of the treatment as well as considering the medical notes and statutory detention documents.

[1]Section 58 relates to the administration of the following forms of treatment in the absence of consent: Electro-Convulsive Therapy at any time; and Medication for mental disorder if three months or more have elapsed since the first administration of medication.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what fees and allowances are paid to second opinion appointed doctors under the Mental Health Act 1983 in April of each year since 1990. [72132]

Jacqui Smith: The table indicates the fee, subsistence and mileage rates in April of each year. Blank entries are where information is not known at present.

Year	*Fees*	*Subsistence 5–10 Hours*	*10–12 Hours*	*Over 12 Hours*	*Mileage Rate*
1990					
1991					
1992					
1993		£4.75	£10.00	£14.75	£0.30
1994		£4.75	£10.00	£14.75	£0.30

Year	Fees	Subsistence 5–10 Hours	Subsistence 10–12 Hours	Subsistence Over 12 Hours	Mileage Rate
1995	£95.50	£4.75	£10.00	£14.75	£0.30
1996	£96.60	£4.75	£10.00	£14.75	£0.30
1997	£96.60	£4.75	£10.00	£14.75	£0.30
1998	£99.25	£4.75	£10.00	£14.75	£0.30
1999	£99.25	£4.75	£10.00	£14.75	£0.30
2000	£102.50	£5.00	£10.00	£15.00	£0.30
2001	£102.50	£5.00	£10.00	£15.00	£0.30
2002	£102.50	£5.00	£10.00	£15.00	£0.30

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors are required by the Mental Health Act Commission to act as second opinion appointed doctors under the Mental Health Act 1983; and how many are in such posts. [72133]

Jacqui Smith: At present the Commission arranges approximately 9,000 second opinions per year and aims to offer second opinion appointed doctors (SOADs) approximately 50 opinions each per year. This equates to a panel size of 180.

At present there are 156 SOADs, compared to 172 at this time last year. The panel size is expected to increase as a result of a forthcoming recruitment exercise. The Commission is also planning to undertake an exercise to consider its current establishment against the number of second opinions requested from each hospital and unit. This will enable the Commission to "weight" each hospital and recruit accordingly.

Doctors (Suspensions)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 846W, on doctors (suspensions), what data is available for the four years preceding 1 January 2000; what conclusions he has drawn as to the reasons for the increase in costs between the first quarter of 2000 and the first quarter of 2002; and what the total cumulative costs of suspensions lasting over six months was for each quarter of *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 in (i) England and (ii) each region. [70725]

Mr. Hutton: The data collected prior to January 2000 is not considered comparable or reliable. The way in which information was collected regionally varied and often the data was incomplete or inaccurate. Following the publication of the document *Supporting Doctors, Protecting Patients* in 1999 we have improved the accuracy and reliability of information on suspensions.

The quarterly figures include the cumulative costs of individual cases that may span a number of quarters. When a doctor is no longer suspended, the next quarterly report will cease to reflect the cost of that case. Where the suspension was prolonged, the reduction from one quarter to the next may be quite substantial.

The reported cumulative costs, per region, of suspensions lasting over six months in England for each quarter of 2000, 2001 and 2002 are as follows:

N West	Northern and Yorks	W. Mids	Eastern	Trent	S. East	S. West	London	England	20
686,811	776,274	244,092	219,608	714,200	526,240	None reported	789,000	3,956,225	Q1
532,015	247,243	450,635	50,000	453,500	591,240	None reported	798,000	3,122,633	Q
742,972	255,793	432,753	50,000	486,059	586,500	None reported	718,000	3,272,077	Q
778,200	420,081	467,182	149,520	653,150	154,562	None reported	478,000	3,100,695	Q
									20
1,012916	489,797	691,075	246,700	980,270	190,000	33,031	602,000	4,245,789	Q
1,215800	603,305	889,235	559,829	723,403	286,000	42,931	554,000	4,874,503	Q
1,393104	700,615	402,568	570,824	734,643	477,613	42,931	204,000	4,526,298	Q
842,652	882,627	618,250	791,201	967,698	215,517	53,000	204,000	4,574,945	Q
									20
942,652	897,153	849,933	787,099	784,514	111,000	63,391	660,000	5,095,742	Q

The Department is supporting the managers who are dealing with individual cases. It has seconded a former NHS Trust Human Resources Director to assist employers find ways to ending suspensions as quickly as possible.

Podiatric Surgery

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce the waiting lists for podiatric surgery. [70376]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* The number of patients waiting for podiatric surgery are not collected centrally.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total cost to the NHS of suspended doctors in the last year for which figures are available. [68658]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The Department routinely collects information on hospital doctors and community dentists who have been suspended for over six months.

The estimated total cost of hospital medical and community dental staff suspended for more than six months for the year 2001 is £5 million. This is based on costs reported as part of the Department's quarterly data collection exercise. The figure includes some legal and locum fees as well as salary costs.

GPs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners were connected to NHSnet as at the end of March. [65057]

Mr. Lammy: At the end of March 2002 there were 8,584, 98 per cent., of general practitioners' practices in England were connected to NHSnet out of a total of 8,725.

Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to encourage recruitment of general practitioners to serve in the London Borough of Lewisham. [73237]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are committed to increasing the National Health Service workforce, getting more doctors and nurses into the areas that need them most. We are providing financial and other incentives to support this. These include Golden Hello payments of up to £10,000 to general practitioners (GPs) new to the NHS in under-doctored areas, more flexible employment arrangements through personal medicial services (PMS) and a £55 million package to improve primary care premises in deprived parts of the country.

In London we have established the pan London action group involving all the key stakeholders with regard to the recruitment and retention of GPs in London. This group is overseeing and monitoring the plans which the workforce development confederations have developed in order to recruit and retain the additional GPs we need.

These plans comprise of a number of actions including;

Increasing the number of GPs through dynamic PMS proposals

Additional GPs as a result of more training places

Additional GPs from an increased conversion rate

GPs returning through the retainers scheme and extending GPs working lives

International recruitment including recruiting from refugee and asylum seekers.

The south east workforce development confederation's plan, which incorporates the London Borough of Lewisham, incorporates all of the above and builds on particular successes in terms of international recruitment and PMS pilots.

Hospital Doctors

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes in hospital doctor productivity he anticipates over the next three years. [72902]

Mr. Hutton: We announced the framework for the new consultant contract on 12 June. The new contract will help contribute to increases in National Health Service productivity. It will increase the proportion of time consultants spend on direct clinical care, make job planning an integral part of the relationship between managers and consultants and give greater rewards to those consultants who contribute most to the NHS.

Health Professionals (Vacancies)

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors ranked according to health authority (i) at the most recent date and (ii) 12 months ago. [72414]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 516W, on health professionals, what information is collected on the number of applications to train as *(a)* GPs, *(b)* social workers, *(c)* physiotherapists and *(d)* special therapists in each of the last five years. [71944]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Information on the number of applicants for general practitioner (GP) register training places has only been collected from 2001. In 2001 the number of applications for GP register training was 2,239.

Information on applications for social worker training is not collected centrally. However, a recent social care recruitment campaign is hoping to raise the number of people applying for social work training by 5,000 by 2004. The courses will start in autumn this year and the social work admissions service will publish figures in December.

The university and colleges admissions service collect data on the number of training applications for the whole of the United Kingdom for physiotherapists.

Year	*Number of applicants*
1997	28,534
1998	27,985
1999	26,316
2000	25,025
2001	25,579

NHS Dentists/GPs

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for reform in the NHS regarding *(a)* dentists and *(b)* general practitioners. [72391]

Mr. Lammy: We intend to publish the *Options for Change* report on National Health Service dentistry shortly.

Options for Change will propose that new approaches are tested, assessed and fine tuned at a local level through demonstration sites to provide a better deal for patients, dentists and the NHS before any national decision are made. Demonstration sites will be run through the Modernisation Agency who will be inviting formal expressions of interests following the publication of the *Options for Change* report.

Plans to reform general practice are set out in the new general medical service contract framework, which has been negotiated by the NHS Confederation and the British Medical Association, and accepted by the profession. The Government are committed to investment in return for reform that delivers higher quality and a wider range of primary care services.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of *(a)* dentists and *(b)* general practitioners were registered with the NHS in each region in each of the last five years. [72385]

Mr. Hutton: Dentists practising in the United Kingdom must be registered with the General Dental Council (GDC).

The total number of registrations on the GDC register is shown in the table together with the number of dentists working in the National Health Service, in the UK for the five years 1997–98 to 2001–02. The table gives NHS dentists as a percentage of GDC registrations.

The GDC register information is not available by region.

Some of the dentists on the GDC register may not be currently practising in the UK. This includes retired dentists, dentists taking career breaks and dentists currently working overseas.

The total number of dentists working in the NHS includes dentists working in the General Dental Service, Personal Dental Service, Community and Hospital Dental Services and salaried dentists.

Number of dentists on the General Dental Council register and the total number and percentage of dentists working in the NHS United Kingdom

	Total number of dentists registered[1] with the General Dental Council (GDC) (thousands)	*Total number of NHS dentists[2,3] (thousands)*	*NHS dentists as percentage of GDC registrations (per cent.)*
1997–98	29.1	25.1	86
1998–99	30.0	25.8	86
1999–2000	31.0	26.4	85
2000–01	31.6	26.8	85
2001–02	31.9	27.4	86

Notes:
1. Dentists registered at 31 December each year.
2. Number of dentists at 30 September each year.
3. Data includes all dentists in the General Dental Service, Personal Dental Service, Community and Hospital Dental Services and salaried dentists.

Equivalent information about general practitioners is not available. All doctors working in the UK must be registered with the General Medical Council (GMC). Their names then appear on the GMC's Medical Register. However the Medical Register does not differentiate between NHS general practitioners and any other doctors. The Register may also include retired doctors, doctors taking career breaks and doctors currently working overseas. The GMC Register is not compiled on a regional basis.

The total number of registered general practitioners working for the NHS in England for each of the last five years for which figures are available, by NHS region, is as follows:

Registered GPs in England by Region

Year	*Northern and Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*Eastern*	*London*	*South Eastern*	*South Western*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*England Total*
1996–97	3,553	2,743	2,910	3,868	4,716	2,966	2,855	3,589	27,200
1997–98	3,564	2,764	2,943	3,952	4,759	3,015	2,886	3,606	27,489
1998–99	3,603	2,779	2,958	3,965	4,798	3,048	2,906	3,624	27,681
1999–2000	3,612	2,797	2,973	3,971	4,820	3,078	2,906	3,634	27,791
2000–01	3,698	2,806	2,959	3,984	4,856	3,112	2,905	3,618	27,938

Notes:
1. Registered GPs include General Medical Services unrestricted Principals, GMS restricted Principals. Personal Medical Services contracted GPs, and PMS salaried GPs
2. Data is as at 1 October for 1997 to 1999, and 30 September for 2000 to 2001
3. Data has been converted to match NHS regional structures for 2001
4. Source: Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Dentists

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists *(a)* left the NHS and *(b)* joined the NHS in each of the last five years; what percentage of the total number of dentists (i) left and (ii) joined the NHS in 2002; and if he will make a statement. [72460]

Mr. Lammy: The available information is for the number and percentage of dentists leaving and joining the general dental service (GDS) in England and is shown in the table for the years 1997–98 to 2001–02. Later data is not yet available.

About 90 per cent. of National Health Service dental services are provided by the GDS. Information on dentists leaving and joining other dental services, including the personal dental service (PDS), community and hospital dental services is not collected centrally.

The number of leavers covers all reasons for leaving the GDS including final retirement from dental work and dentists taking career breaks as well as those who left to practice solely privately. Figures from 1998–99 onwards are inflated by the transfer of some dentists from the GDS

to some PDS pilots. The total number of dentists includes principals on a health authority list, assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

Since 1997–98 more dentists have joined than left. The number of GDS dentists has increased from 16,387 at March 1997 to 18,254 in March 2002, an increase of 1,867. Dentists are able to vary the amount of work they do in the GDS.

General Dental Service (GDS): Number and percentage[2] of dentists who left and joined the GDS from 1997–98 to 2001–02

England	Dentists who left the GDS		Dentists who joined the GDS	
Year	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1997–98	900	5	1,341	8
1998–99[1]	972	6	1,462	9
1999–2000[1]	1,032	6	1,517	9
2000–01[1]	1,192	7	1,459	8
2001–02[1]	1,216	7	1,366	8

Notes:

1. Figures affected by the transfer of some dentists from the GDS to the PDS.
2. Percentages of dentists leaving and joining are based on the number of dentists working at the start of the year.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Code of Practice for NHS Professionals. [66844]

Mr. Hutton: The Code of Practice for the Supply of Temporary Staffing was published on 15 July 2002 on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/international-recruitment/code. Hard copies of the Code will be available shortly, and will be placed in the Library.

Nursing

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government take to promote nursing as a profession. [72444]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are implementing a range of measures to promote careers in the National Health Service, including nurses. These include increasing pay, encouraging the NHS to become a better employer through the *Improving Working Lives and Positively Diverse* programmes, increasing training commissions, reducing student attrition, running national and local recruitment and return to practice campaigns, and supporting international recruitment where appropriate. Further information on improving working lives is available at www.doh.gov.uk/iwl.

The NHS Careers service was established in April 1999 by the Department to provide accurate and up-to-date information on careers throughout the NHS and to promote nursing as a profession. It has a website www.nhs.uk/careers through which publications can be ordered.

This year's national recruitment campaign ran from 13 February for six weeks and was aimed primarily at raising the profile and the recruitment, retention and return of nurses. Over 51,000 contacts, primarily interested in nursing careers were received at NHS Careers.

Since 1997, the nursing workforce has grown by 31,520. Between September 1999 and September 2001 there was a net increase in nurses working in the NHS of 20,740—the NHS Plan target has been reached two years early. The number of applicants to nurse training has also increased with 40,908 being received in the academic year 2000–01 as opposed to 18,732 in 1997–98.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken by NHS trusts to reduce assaults on nurses. [61447]

Mr. Hutton: Significant action has been taken at both national and local levels to tackle the problem of violence as part of the cross-Government National Health Service zero tolerance zone campaign. Many NHS trusts have taken the opportunity to launch local campaigns with a focus on specific areas of concern.

Recent surveys conducted in the NHS indicate that almost all NHS trusts have now published policies for reducing the incidence of violence, and also provide evidence that a wide range of measures are being introduced by employers to tackle this problem. These include the installation or upgrading of hospital CCTV systems, other changes to the physical environment and the provision of safety awareness training to staff. Many trusts have also reviewed the support available to staff when violent incidents do occur.

For the first time ever, new money has been allocated specifically to support the efforts of managers and staff in tackling violence in the NHS. The new funding is expected to be matched by employers, which means that over the three years over £3 million will be invested in new initiatives to protect staff. The money is supporting a range of initiatives from making improvements to risk assessment process to the purchase of personal alarms. In 2001–02, over £791,110 central funding has been invested to support 173 new local measures to protect staff.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will collate statistics on the number of *(a)* British and *(b)* foreign nurses practising in the UK who carry HIV. [73444]

Mr. Hutton: There is currently no requirement on National Health Service employers to offer or require an HIV test prior to employment of nurses, whether recruited from the United Kingdom or abroad. Therefore, information on the number of HIV infected nurses (of any nationality) working in the NHS is currently not collected centrally.

The Department is considering the recommendations of an ad hoc expert group set up to assess the potential health risk posed to patients by health care workers new to the NHS infected with serious communicable diseases, including HIV. Implementation of any resulting change in policy would include consideration of monitoring needs.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were recruited for the NHS is each of the last five years for which figures are available

from *(a)* Botswana, *(b)* South Africa, *(c)* Uganda, *(d)* Namibia, *(e)* Tanzania, *(f)* Kenya and *(g)* Malawi; and if he will make a statement on recruitment from countries with a high incidence of HIV. [72010]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the country of origin of staff working in the National Health Service is not collected centrally.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 18 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 536W, how many of the nurse, midwife and health visitor consultant posts being approved have been taken up by experienced nurses who have returned to the NHS following a substantial period outside the profession. [72838]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

The nature of nurse consultant posts demand a portfolio of career-long learning, experience and formal education, usually up to or beyond masters degree level including research experience and a record of scholarship. Most nurses who have had a substantial period of time outside the profession are unlikely to have the relevant recent experience required for nurse consultant posts.

Wheelchair Services

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to introduce national standards for prosthetic, orthotic and wheelchair services and if he will make a statement. [71797]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* We are currently working with multi professional groups in prosthetic and orthotic services and looking at ways of enhancing patient care through programmes such as the action on orthopaedics and the work of the prosthetic strategic supply group. We will consider in due course, whether any outcomes of this work can be issued as appropriate guidance to the National Health Service.

We are also working with the Modernisation Agency to improve wheelchair services and to spread best practice across the country. Several national groups, with an interest, have been working on standards for the wheelchair service. As the collaborative work progresses, we will review whether one such standard could be given Departmental endorsement.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing homes closed in London in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [69966]

Jacqui Smith: The number of residential care homes and nursing homes[1] for each year since 1997 is given in the tables.

Information on nursing homes is collected at health authority rather than local authority level.

[1]General and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics. Includes dual registered homes, therefore the number of residential homes and nursing homes should not be added together.

Table 1: Number of nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics, 1997 to 2001.

At 31 March — *Number*

Health Authority[3]	*1997*	*1998*	*Year*[2] *1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Barking and Havering	18	22	23	24	24
Barnet	29	34	35	36	32
Bexley and Greenwich	19	29	28	24	23
Brent and Harrow	24	32	37	35	37
Bromley	35	34	29	29	29
Camden and Islington	14	14	17	18	17
Croydon	33	36	40	..	38
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	23	33	30	34	32
East London and The City	15	16	26	19	20
Enfield and Haringey	30	32	31	28	29
Hillingdon	13	12	13	14	15
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	40	57	63	63	71
Kingston and Richmond	23	23	22	22	22
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	49	58	68	69	67
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	61	61	66	66	68
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	24	27	26	27	24

Source:
Department of Health annual returns
.. not available
[2] The number of homes in 1997 refers to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997
[3] Information on nursing homes is collected at the Health Authority rather than Local Authority level.

Table 2: Number of residential care homes[4, 5] *1997 to 2001.*

At 31 March — *Number*

London Borough[6]	*1997*	*1998*	*Year 1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Barking and Dagenham	29	33	33	33	31
Barnet	112	130	127	132	126
Bexley	58	64	67	67	63
Brent	92	95	97	87	87
Bromley	112	100	107	107	99

Table 2: Number of residential care homes[4, 5] 1997 to 2001.

At 31 March *Number*

London Borough[6]	*1997*	*1998*	*Year 1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Camden	70	66	56	55	47
City of London	0	0	0	0	0
Croydon	143	185	183	192	207
Ealing	101	120	100	72	100
Enfield	113	126	124	117	123
Greenwich	46	50	19	45	47
Hackney	39	39	34	38	46
Hammersmith and Fulham	34	33	..	33	32
Haringey	104	94	109	116	122
Harrow	77	76	75	77	76
Havering	66	61	64	63	65
Hillingdon	68	70	67	71	68
Hounslow	39	44	43	48	40
Islington	43	42	55	41	40
Kensington and Chelsea	22	21	18	18	16
Kingston-upon-Thames	71	70	71	66	65
Lambeth	119	115	114	108	105
Lewisham	83	76	87	84	85
Merton	54	52	60	56	61
Newham	47	52	50	55	57
Redbridge	69	77	72	75	70
Richmond-upon-Thames	54	63	59	55	55
Southwark	78	46	73	72	72
Sutton	62	64	62	60	59
Tower Hamlets	31	28	28	28	23
Waltham Forest	99	98	118	109	108
Wandsworth	80	77	78	98	95
Westminster	40	41	35	36	35

Source:
Department of Health annual returns
.. Not available
[4] Excludes children's homes
[5] Includes dual registered homes, therefore the number of nursing homes and residential homes should not be added together.
[6] Information is collected at the Local Authority geographical level and is presented for each London Borough.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contingency arrangements *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the National Care Standards Commission have made to advise care home managers concerning their legal obligations in respect of staff awaiting the results of a criminal record check after 1 August; how many care home staff are awaiting a clearance check by the Criminal Records Bureau; how long they have been waiting; and what action a home failing to comply with staffing regulations because of delays by the Criminal Records Bureau will be required to take. [71202]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* All the statutory regulations are immediately accessible on the Department's website and the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) internet website. The Care Homes Regulations were published in December 2001 following extensive consultation and were immediately placed on the Department's website.

The NCSC wrote to all pre-existing care homes on 8 March 2002 with a guide to the application of the Care Standards Act. The guide included general information about legal requirements, including the requirement for care homes to obtain criminal records checks on staff. The guide included addresses for obtaining more information. The guide also included an application form for providers to apply for the relevant national standards document. Each set of national standards includes the appropriate regulations at the back.

The NCSC sent a registration pack to all unregistered care homes in February 2002 and sends a registration pack to all new applicants. The pack advises applicants to check the legal requirements before submitting their application to the NCSC.

In addition, the NCSC wrote to all providers in June reminding them of their obligations. This information can be found on the NCSC's website, which also sets out guidance to help providers manage their staff recruitment until the Criminal Records Bureau is fully meeting its targets. The NCSC has also co-operated with the care homes' umbrella organisations, to arrange for publication of this information on their internal sites.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received in connection with the implementation of standards 21.3 and 22.2 of the National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People; if he will place them in the Library; what assessment he has made of the impact of standards 21.3 and 22.2 of the National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People on the availability of beds in residential care and nursing homes; what estimate he has

made of the impact on the number of care homes of the requirement of complying with the National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People; and what estimate he has made of the average amount that each care home will have to spend in order to comply with the National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People. [65040]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not easily available. The Department has received a large number of letter about national standards from care home owners, their representatives and other interested parties. Some of these letters include reference to paragraph 21.3 or paragraph 22.2 or both. Separating out all those letters which mention these paragraphs and placing them in the Library would involve disproportionate cost.

On 23 July my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health announced his intention to issue for consultation an amended set of physical environment standards. The aim of the amendments is to remove the requirement for care homes which existed before 1 April 2002 to conform to certain physical environment standards, including standards 21.3 and 22.2. For pre-existing care homes these standards would in future be regarded as good practice to which all care homes should aspire.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the situation facing local authorities and the private sector with regard to care homes. [71762]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement on older people's services which my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State made to the House on 23 July at columns 869–72.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many care homes have *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in each region in each of the last five years. [72545]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures he has collated of the average cost over the past five years, by region, for residents of a private care home. [72384]

Jacqui Smith: Information on care home fee levels is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may find it helpful to consult reports of the recent annual surveys of the care home sector undertaken by consultants Laing and Buisson. These contain information on the average weekly fees in each region charged by private care homes for elderly people.

The social services performance assessment framework indicators published in October 2001 contain information on councils' unit costs for providing residential and nursing care for different client groups. A copy of this document is available in the Library.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential care home places for elderly people were closed in *(a)* England and *(b)* the NHS during the last 12 months. [72951]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Children's Hospices

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the children's hospices in the North West region; and what grant from his Department was allocated to each children's hospice in each of the last five years. [69404]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 July 2002]:* There are five children's hospices in the North West of England:

Brian House, Blackpool;

Derian House, Chorley;

Zoe's Place, Liverpool (baby hospice);

Francis House, Manchester; and

Claire House, Wirral.

The Department has never awarded grants to children's hospices. The level of National Health Service funding is for primary care trusts to determine, as part of their health improvement programmes, in consultation with their local partners.

However, the New Opportunities Fund invited applications to participate in a £48 million children's palliative care programme in England, of which £15.3 million is specifically available to promote high quality provision within children's hospices. The closing date for applications was 16 August and applicants will be informed of the outcome in January 2003.

Child Care Co-ordinators

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS trusts have a child care co-ordinator. [68284]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 July 2002]:* There are at least eighty National Health Service child care co-ordinators in post throughout the NHS, and recruitment is continuing. Childcare co-ordinators may cover one trust, a number of trusts, or the whole local health economy, including the primary care trusts. We expect that by April 2003, all NHS staff will have access to the services of a childcare co-ordinator to offer support and advice to parents working in the NHS.

Children (Prescriptions)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is given to individual carers about the type of prescriptions provided to children in care. [71738]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* We have issued National Minimum Standards across the range of children's services. The standards for fostering services, which accounts for two thirds of all children in care, state that the carer should be provided with a written health record for each child placed in their care, and that this should be updated during the period of the placement. In addition, before a placement begins, the carer should be provided with as full a description as possible of the health needs of a child and clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical treatment. Where it is an agency placement, the responsible authority should

pass the information on to the agency, who in turn passes it on to the carer. Similar arrangements apply to those placed in children's homes.

Health and Social Care Inspectorate

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the National Care Standards Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate will be abolished and their functions transfered to the Health and Social Care Inspectorate. [72150]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 19 April, we plan to set up two new independent inspectorates, the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and the Commission for Social Care Inspection. These new bodies will further strengthen the system for inspecting health and social care, ensure clearer public accountability and rationalise the number of bodies regulating health and social care.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection will create a single comprehensive Inspectorate for social care, bringing together the inspection functions of the social services inspectorate, including a number of their function with the Audit Commission, and the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) and including the regulation of social care providers. The NCSC and the social services inspectorate will continue with their existing work until the new body goes live.

Social Workers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers per 1,000 population there were in *(a)* St Helens, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the North West and *(d)* England in each year since 1996. [71280]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The table below shows the whole-time equivalent number of social work staff (including care managers) per 1,000 population as at 30 September for each year between 1996 and 2001 for St. Helens, Merseyside, the North West excluding Merseyside and England as a whole.

Social work staff[1] *(whole-time equivalent) per 1,000 population*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[2]
St. Helens	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6
Merseyside	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.7
North-West (excluding Merseyside)	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
England	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7

[1] Includes care managers
[2] 2000 population figures used as these are the latest available
Sources: Form SSDS001, annual return of local authority social services departments staff and Office for National Statistics population figures

Prisoners' Mental Health

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 125W, on mental health, what information is held on the mental health of inmates in British prisons; and if he will make it available. [72422]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the mental health of prisoners in England and Wales is contained in the report of a survey of psychiatric morbidity among prisoners carried out by the Office for National Statistics in 1997, a copy of which is available in the Library. Information on the mental health of prisoners in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved administrations.

Mental Health

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to encourage the use of technology in improving dementia care. [61342]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 June 2002]:* Passive personal alarm systems and other such technology that detects unusual patterns of domestic activity, wandering and unlit gas are a useful addition to the field of dementia care. Use may reduce or postpone admissions to residential or nursing care and can improve the quality of life for carers. Every opportunity is taken by Ministers and officials to encourage the spread of such technology as part of the funded national project to integrate community equipment services by 2004 and to increase the number of people benefiting from these services by 50 per cent.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average time was for appeals to mental health review tribunals to be heard in each region in the most recent year for which information is available. [65794]

Jacqui Smith: There are three separate categories that Mental Health Review Tribunal's fall into: Section 2, Non-Restricted and Restricted. The section 2 target is a statutory target.

Section 2 tribunals must be heard within 7 days of the application being received in the office.

Non-restricted cases are listed as speedily as possible but no earlier than 3 weeks after receipt because the Responsible Authority has three weeks under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983 in which to provide reports for the Tribunal. Before October 2001, the non-restricted tribunals were required to be listed within 8 weeks of the application being received in the office. Subsequent case law requires the tribunal to be less rigid, and to list speedily taking into account the circumstances of individual cases

Restricted cases must be heard within 20 weeks of the application being received in the office.

Timing of listed appeals:

The average time for appeals to be heard between July 2001-June 2002 and is divided into the four regions.

North London and East Region
Section 2—9 days
Non-Restricted—7.2 weeks
Restricted—18.2 weeks

South London, South and West Region
Section 2—8.3 days
Non-Restricted—8.4 weeks
Restricted—18 weeks

West Midland and North West Region
Section 2—6.1 days
Non-Restricted—7.5 weeks
Restricted—19.6 weeks

Trent, Northern and Yorkshire Region
Section 2—6.3 days
Non-Restricted—7.8 weeks
Restricted—19.4 weeks

National Averages
Section 2—7.4 days
Non-Restricted—7.7 weeks
Restricted—18.8 weeks

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met colleagues in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister to discuss the Social Exclusion Unit's work on mental health issues; and what future meetings are planned. [67983]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* Officials from the Department are involved in the Social Exclusion Unit's current projects and meet on a regular basis, seeking to ensure that these reflect the needs of mental health service users

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Newcastle Declaration made on 25 June in respect of mental health and its treatment. [68047]

Mr. Hutton: The launch of the first year strategy for the National Institute for Mental Health in England in Newcastle on 25 June brought together professionals and service users to show their support for the work being prepared on early intervention services. Discussions have formed the basis of the Newcastle Declaration which emphasises the high levels of care for people in the early stages of psychosis.

The Declaration is now being taken forward to an International Conference in Copenhagen in the Autumn and is a sign of the broad support for the conventions taken forward.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much spending there was on mental health services in *(a)* St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the North West and *(d)* England in each year since 1996; and what the projected amounts are for (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003. [71282]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The data for 1996–97 to 2000–01 are shown in the table below. Projections are not available.

	St Helens	*Merseyside*	*North West*	*England*
		£'000		
1996–97	16,287	57,643	350,192	2,648,191
1997–98	17,066	63,037	365,286	2,767,036
1998–99	19,684	72,595	395,425	2,925,934
1999–2000	21,485	81,780	454,238	3,445,341
2000–01	24,105	144,293	546,979	3,952,618

Figures are secondary mental illness expenditure by the health authority and, for 2000–01, by PCTs.
Sources:
Health authority audited accounts 1996–97 to 1998–99;
Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01;
Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01.
Notes:
Merseyside includes St Helens and Knowsley. Sefton and Liverpool health authorities.
Sefton included £63 million mental illness expenditure in 2000–01, when it was the lead commissioner for secure mental health services in the North West region. This explains the large increase in the Merseyside figures for 2000–01.
North West includes the 16 health authorities.
Primary mental illness expenditure is not separately identified in the accounts/summarisation schedules.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding is available for *(a)* mental health services and *(b)* mental health counselling services in Buckinghamshire in the current financial year; what the corresponding figures were, adjusted for inflation, in 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [72596]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The Government is committed to the delivery of effective mental health services for those people who need them. The NHS Plan built on the national framework for mental health by providing for extra investment of over £300 million by 2004.

The information requested is held at health authority and primary care trust level.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what format his Department holds information regarding the *(a)* number of acute psychiatric beds, *(b)* occupancy rate and *(c)* delayed discharge from these beds. [71947]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Information regarding the number of hospital beds and occupancy rate is collected annually via the Department's collection from KHO3 "Bed Availability and Occupancy". The form requests availability and occupancy of beds in wards open overnight by ward classification. A section for information on mental illness is split into three parts: children—short stay, long stay, elderly—short stay, long stay and other ages—secure unit, short stay, long stay.

The resulting data is published on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/

Information on delayed discharge from these beds is not collected.

Learning Disabilities

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in the implementation of the Learning Disabilities Strategy set out in the White Paper "Valuing People". [72985]

Jacqui Smith: We are continuing to make good progress in delivering the programme of action set out in the White Paper *Valuing People: A New strategy for Learning Disability for the 21 Century* (March 2001).

I last reported progress to the House on 1 February (column 535). I was pleased to report then on good progress in setting up Learning Disability Partnership Boards, the Learning Disability Task Force, and the *Valuing People* Support Team, and on the early distribution of guidance. Progress since February includes:

The Valuing People Support Team is fully operational and is continuing to develop effective links with Learning Disability Partnership Boards. It has started on a wide ranging programme of activities to support Boards in achieving their objectives, for example around person centred planning and employment strategies

We have allocated £900,000 to fifty seven citizen advocacy and self advocacy projects across the country in the first year of a three year funding programme

Work is under way on a joint Department of Health/Department for Work and Pensions study of the interface between day centres and supported employment (due for completion in April/May 2003)

We have published guidance jointly with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on housing and support options for people with learning disabilities. This is in draft on the Department's learning disability website for consultation. The guidance will help Partnership Boards and local councils develop housing strategies for people with learning disabilities

Guidance on Health Action Plans has been published and is being distributed to Learning Disability Partnership Boards

The Learning Disability Task Force has held three further meetings at which it has discussed a range of issues and has had presentations from a number of Government departments. Task Force sub groups are taking forward more detailed work on individual topics

All learning disability joint investment plans (JIPs) have been evaluated and Learning Disability Development Fund (LDDF) revenue was distributed by the end of March to all but six Partnership Boards whose JIPs were unsatisfactory; all but one of these have since been brought up to standard and money released.

We have commissioned and started work on a national survey of people with learning disabilities

A National Forum of People with Learning Disabilities continues to provide a voice for people using learning disability services. We are supporting the establishment of a network of Regional Forums which will feed in to the National Forum and ensure that it is properly representative

The Learning Disability Task Force will be reporting to me later in the year on its work in overseeing the *Valuing Prople* implementation programme. I will also be publishing a separate report on learning disability services later in the year.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funding is made available to provide residential care and supported living for people with a learning disability; and if he will make a statement; [66302]

(2) what guidance is forwarded to social services departments regarding the collection of *(a)* the numbers of older carers and *(b)* information about the caring needs, family circumstances and housing needs of people with a learning disability; and if he will make a statement. [66303]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the response I gave my hon. Friend, the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on 9 July 2002 at columns 889–90W.

Local councils decide the level of funding provided for residential care for people with a learning disability according to need, no specific amounts are made available for this purpose. Gross current expenditure on care for learning disabled people by councils with social services responsibilities in England in 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the latest two years for which this information is available, was

	1999–2000 (£million)	*2000–01 (£million)*
Residential care	922.0	1015.3
Non-residential care	605.4	631.8
Total	1527.4	1647.1

Note:

Figures do not include the costs of assessment related work by social services departments, or the costs of commissioning provision from the private and independent sector and other local authorities.

We do not specifically require local authorities to collect numbers of older carers but our "Fair Access to Care Services" guidance issued on 28 May (copies available in the library) sets out that social services departments should monitor the extent to which different groups are referred, which groups receive an assessment and which groups go on to receive services.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements he is making to monitor the implementation of the White Paper on learning disabilities "Valuing People" by local learning disability partnership boards. [72986]

Jacqui Smith: We are committed to ensuring the effective delivery of the programme of action set out in the White Paper *Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21 Century* (March 2001).

Implementation of the strategy is primarily the responsibility of local authorities as set out in the implementation guidance issued in August 2001.

Progress made in the implementation of *Valuing People* at council level is monitored by the social services inspectorate using the existing performance assessment framework for social services. Through the monitoring element of the framework, councils provide annual summaries of the improvement priorities, targets and strategies. Progress with these improvements is updated during the year and reviewed annually prior to the determination of the councils' overall performance (star) rating.

The *Valuing People* Support Team is continuing to develop links with local learning disability partnership boards and will also provide information on progress with implementation. A national survey of people with learning disabilities has been commissioned which will describe users' experiences of services and help to identify areas where improvement is needed.

The £2 million learning disability research programme will help to improve the evidence base. Projects being funded include ones designed to assess the effects of the *Valuing People* programme.

The learning disability task force's annual report, due later this year, will provide an overview of progress by all partners in the implementation programme and advise on any aspects of implementation where particular action might be required.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the reports of the

Personal Social Services Research Unit submitted to his Department in *(a)* December 2001 and *(b)* February 2002; and what action has been taken in response to the findings and conclusions. [71195]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The research the Department commissioned is being analysed in the Department. The findings, will inform future policy considerations.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for funding PCTs that have more GPs than the recommended average per 100,000 people. [72887]

Mr. Hutton: The framework document for the new general medical services contract proposes the introduction of a formula that links funding to patient numbers, and that a fair shares distribution will be achieved over time. Detailed negotiations on the contract including transitional arrangements are taking place now the framework has been approved in a ballot of general practitioners.

Primary Care (Twickenham)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his latest estimate is of the general practitioner/patient ratio in *(a)* Twickenham and *(b)* the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames; and if he will make a statement. [72496]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information available is shown in the table.

NHS Plan GPs[1] and Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents[2] (UPEs) and Patients for Kingston and Richmond Health Authority as at 30 September 2001

	HA and PCG/T Code	*NHS Plan GPs*	*of which: UPEs*	*Patients*	*Average List Size NHS Plan*	*numbers Average List Size of UPEs*
Kingston and Richmond HA	QAG	197	191	369,728	1,877	1,936
Kingston PCT	5A5	93	93	175,007	1,882	1,882
Richmond PCG	4RM35	48	44	90,180	1,879	2,050
Teddington, Twickenham and Hamptons PCT	5A6	56	54	104,541	1,867	1,936

Note:
[1]NHS Plan GPs includes UPEs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA) and PMS Other
[2]UPEs includes GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, and PMS Salaried GPs.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been committed to improving access to primary care in Twickenham since 1997; what improvements have taken place; and if he will make a statement. [72495]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* As part of the Department's commitment to improving access to primary care nationally, we have increased the primary care trust primary care access fund by £83.5 million to £168 million, with at least £48 million dedicated in 2002–03 to improving access in primary care and implementing advanced access. Richmond and Twickenham Primary Care Trust has received £150,000 from the primary care access fund.

In 1997 the Kingston and Richmond Health Authority used improvement grants to fund schemes that improved physical access to surgeries and improved communications with surgeries.

From 1998 the new primary care organisations within Richmond and Twickenham began to work with local general practitioners (GPs) to explore new ways of working. Teddington, Twickenham and Hamptons successfully bid to participate in the national primary care collaborative focussing on improved coronary heart disease (CHD) care, improving access to primary care and managing capacity. Funding available for this scheme totalled £149,000 over two years. This has allowed primary care teams to scrutinise the demand on their services and look to manage that demand using a variety of methods including telephone triage/consultations by GPs, nurse triage, changing the skill mix by employing health assistants. A further £110,000 was spent on innovative projects that focused on partnership developments, for example, with the voluntary sector, community pharmacy, to improve access by ensuring that patients were seen by the right professional in the right place.

The programme extends from pilot sites and is being extended to the whole of Richmond. Available resources this year are £150,000 and will be spent on further improving access.

The primary care organisations continued to support the improvements of physical access to surgeries by investment in for example, induction loops, tactile signage, and ramps. In 2001–02 at least £220,000 was invested in this area.

Consultant Treatment

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to monitor how many patients originally referred to a NHS consultant finally receive treatment in the private sector from the same consultant. [72222]

Mr. Hutton: This Department does not collect information about private patients treated in private hospitals. We have agreed as part of the framework for the new consultant contract that there will be contractual provisions governing the relationship between private practice and National Health Service commitments, based on the principle that an NHS consultant's commitment to the NHS must take priority over any work undertaken for other organisations. The detail of the provisions is under discussion, but we have agreed that consultants will be required to inform employers of their private practice commitments, as part of their annual job planning and appraisal process.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce regulations to prevent consultants treating patients in their private practices that were originally referred to them through the NHS. [72221]

Mr. Hutton: We have agreed as part of the framework for the new consultant contract that there will be contractual provisions governing the relationship between private practice and National Health Service commitments. These provisions will be based on the principle that an NHS consultant's commitment to the NHS must take priority over any work undertaken for other organisations and designed to minimise the potential for actual or perceived conflicts of interest. One of the key principles is that consultants should not allow private practice to disrupt the provision of NHS services or have any adverse impact on NHS performance or delivery of NHS commitments. The detail of the provisions is under discussion, but we have agreed that the areas covered by the new rules will include the transfer of patients between the NHS and private sector, and management of NHS waiting lists.

NHS Planning

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered *(a)* town planners, *(b)* landscape designers, *(c)* chartered surveyors and *(d)* architects work in (i) NHS Estates, (ii) NHS regional offices and (iii) NHS trusts. [71857]

Mr. Lammy: NHS Estates employs four town planners, forty-seven chartered surveryors and fourteen architects. In addition it draws on specialist expertise from outside the Agency. We do not hold the requested information on National Health Service trusts centrally. NHS regional offices ceased to exist on 1 April 2002.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to publicise the fact that accident and emergency departments do not give advice over the phone. [72415]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has taken no specific measures to publicise the fact the accident and emergency departments do not give advice over the phone.

Patients can obtain telephone advice on medical emergencies from NHS Direct, a nurse-led telephone helpline providing health information and advice 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is in accident and emergency departments by region, before a patient gets treated in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [72461]

Mr. Lammy: The Department does not routinely collect information on average waiting times in accident and emergency departments (A and E).

Information on total time in A and E from arrival to transfer, admission or discharge has been collected by the Department since August 2001. We have reliable data from October 2001.

The table below shows the number of people spending four hours or less in A and E by region from October 2001 to March 2002.

Percentage of patients spending less than four hours in A and E from arrival to transfer, admission or discharge.

Organisation	*Number of A and E attendances*	*Number of patients spending under 4 hours in A and E*	*Patients spending under 4 hours in A and E per cent.*
Eastern	488,915	365,871	75
London	1,015,261	653,043	64
North West	861,612	665,217	77
North Yorkshire	779,716	680,503	87
South East	822,514	612,993	75
South West	443,697	357,123	80
Trent	500,379	406,254	81
West Midlands	641,729	536,635	84
England	5,553,823	4,277,639	77

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to deal with increased accident and emergency admissions in the south-west area [71264]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* In the former south west region over £15 million from the accident and emergency (A and E) modernisation fund has been invested in improving A and E facilities over the last three years.

Private Bed Facilities

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much revenue was earned by hospital trusts operating private bed facilities in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [71084]

(2) if he will list those hospital trusts operating private bed facilities. [71085]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* In 2000–01 the total gross income received and receivable for patient care services from private patients treated by National Health Service trusts was £316,627,000. *Source:* NHS Trust Summarisation Schedules 2000–01. The income reported is for all private patients and not just those using a bed.

The Department does not maintain records centrally of the private facilities operated by NHS acute trusts. A list of NHS trusts reporting finished consultant episodes for private patients in 2000–01 is shown in the table.

Hospital Episode Statistics: NHS Hospitals in England Reporting Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs) for Private Patients for 2000–01

Addenbrooke's NHS Trust
Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust
Airedale NHS Trust
Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust
Avon and Western Wiltshire MHC NHS Trust
Barnsley Community and Priority
Barnsley District General Hospital
Barts and The London NHS Trust
Basildon and Thurrock General Hospital

Bassetlaw Hospital and Community NHS Trust
Bath and West Community NHS Trust
Bay Community NHS Trust
Bedford Hospitals NHS Trust
Birmingham Children's Hospital
Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust
Birmingham Women's Healthcare NHS Trust
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care NHS Trust
Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde Community Health Services NHS Trust
Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust
Bournewood Community and Mental Health NHS Trust
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust
Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust
Burton Hospitals NHS Trust
Bury Health Care NHS Trust
Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust
Camden and Islington Community Health Services NHS Trust
Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust
Central Manchester Healthcare Trust
Central Sheffield University Hospital
Chase Farm Wellhouse NHS Trust
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust
Christie Hospital NHS Trust
City hospitals sunderland NHS Trust
Clatterbridge Centre For Oncology NHS Trust
Cornwall Healthcare NHS Trust
Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust
Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust
Dewsbury health care NHS Trust
Doncaster Royal Infirmary
Dorset Community NHS Trust
Dorset Healthcare NHS Trust
Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust
Durham County Priority Service
East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust
East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust
East Cheshire NHS Trust
East Gloucestershire NHS Trust
East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust
East London and The City Mental Health NHS Trust
East Somerset NHS Trust
Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust
Epsom/St Helier NHS Trust
Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust
Exeter and District Community Health Service NHS Trust
Forest Healthcare NHS Trust
Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust
Gateshead Health NHS Trust
George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust
Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust
Guild Community Healthcare NHS Trust
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust
Halton General Hospital NHS Trust
Harrogate Healthcare NHS Trust
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust
Havering Hospitals NHS Trust
Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospital
Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust
Herefordshire Community Health
Hinchingbrooke Healthcare NHS Trust
Homerton Hospital NHS Trust
Huddersfield NHS Trust
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospital
Invicta Community Care NHS Trust
Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust
Isle Of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust
James Paget Hospital NHS Trust
Kettering General Hospital NHS Trust
King's Healthcare NHS Trust
Kings Lynn and Wisbech Hospitals
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Leicestershire and Rutland Healthcare NHS Trust
Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust
Liverpool Womens Hospital NHS Trust
Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust
Medway NHS Trust
Mid Essex Hospitals NHS Trust
Mid Staffordshire General Hospital
Mid Sussex NHS Trust
Milton Keynes General Hospital
Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust
Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust
Newham Community Health Services NHS Trust
Newham Healthcare NHS Trust
Norfolk and Norwich Health Care NHS Trust
Norfolk Mental Healthcare NHS Trust
North Bristol NHS Trust
North Dorset Primary Care Trust
North Durham Healthcare NHS Trust
North East Lincolnshire NHS Trust
North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust
North Hampshire, Loddon Community NHS Trust
North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust
North Sefton and West Lancashire Community NHS Trust
North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust
Northallerton Health Services
Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust
Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Northern General Hospital NHS Trust
Northgate and Prudhoe NHS Trust
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust
Northwick Park/Central Middlesex
Norwich Community Health Partnership NHS Trust
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust
Nottingham Healthcare NHS Trust
Nottingham University Hospital
Nuffield Orthopaedic NHS Trust
Oldham NHS Trust
Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust
Papworth Hospital NHS Trust
Parkside Health NHS Trust
Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust
Pinderfields and Pontefract hospital
Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust
Poole Hospitals NHS Trust
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust
Premier Health NHS Trust
Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust
Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust
Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and DH NHS Trust
Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust
Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust
Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen Univ. Hosp. NHS Trust
Royal Liverpool Childrens NHS Trust
Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases NHS Trust
Royal Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust
Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust
Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
Salisbury Healthcare NHS Trust
Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust
Scarborough and NE yorkshire health
Scunthorpe and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust
Sheffield Children's Hospital
Shropshire's Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust

South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust
South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
South Durham health care NHS Trust
South Essex Mental Health and Community Care NHS Trust
South London and Maudsley NHS Trust
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
South tyneside Healthcare NHS Trust
South Warwickshire General Hospital
Southampton Community Health Services NHS Trust
Southampton University Hospital
Southend Hospital NHS Trust
Southport and Ormskirk NHS Trust
St George's Healthcare NHS Trust
St Helens and Knowsley Hospitals
St Mary's Hospital NHS Trust
Stockport NHS Trust
Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust
Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust
Tameside and Glossop Acute Services NHS Trust
Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust
The Cardiothoracic Centre Liverpool NHS Trust
The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust
The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust
The Manchester Children's Hospital
The Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust
The Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospital
The Princess Alexandra Hospital
The Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust
The Queen Victoria Hospital NHS Trust
The Royal Free Hampstead Hospital
The Royal Marsden Hospital NHS Trust
The Royal National Orthopaedic NHS Trust
The Royal West Sussex NHS Trust
The Royal Wolverhampton Hospital
The United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust
Tower Hamlets Healthcare NHS Trust
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
University Hospital Birmingham
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust
Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust
Warrington Hospital NHS Trust
West Cumbria Healthcare NHS Trust
West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust
West Middlesex University NHS Trust
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust
Weston Area Health NHS Trust
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
Wigan and Leigh Health Services
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust
Wirral Hospital NHS Trust
Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Worcestershire Community and Mental Health NHS Trust
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust
Worthing Priority Care Services NHS Trust
Wrightington Hospital NHS Trust
York Health Services NHS Trust

A FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one healthcare provider. *Source:* Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Private Treatment

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were treated by the private sector in Somerset in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [71237]

Ms Blears: This information is not available centrally. The Department is reviewing its information needs as far as National Health Service funded activity in the private sector is concerned.

NHS Efficiency Task Force

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what procedures the work of the NHS Efficiency Task Force is evaluated. [68161]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The National Health Service efficiency taskforce and its members provided specific and general advice on a range of issues relating to performance improvement. The taskforce last met on 28 June 1999. We continue to consult widely, with the NHS, academics and leading policy makers from abroad, on the range performance issues including efficiency.

National Health Service Framework

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget was for the implementation of the National Service Framework on *(a)* cancer, *(b)* heart disease and *(c)* mental health in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) each of the previous three years. [68144]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Resources to support the implementation of national service frameworks are largely included in allocations to health authorities.

The NHS Cancer Plan was published in September 2000. Additional funding made available, including revenue and capital, to support its implementation after that date has been:

2001–02 £m	*2002–03 £m*
280	407

In addition £100 million capital has been made available for CT scanners, simulators and radiotherapy planning equipment.

The national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease was published in March 2000. Additional revenue to support implementation from that date has been:

2000–01 £m	*2001–02 £m*	*2002–03 £m*
68.2	150.5	334.5

In addition £285 million capital has been made available, the bulk of which will spent over the next four years to fund modernisation and expansion at 12 cardiac centres.

The NSF for mental health was published in September 1999.

Additional revenue to support implementation of the NSF and NHS Plan from that date has been:

1999–2000 £m	*2000–01 £m*	*2001–02 £m*	*2002–03 £m*
68.5	66.0	12.35	93.5

In addition £160 million capital has been made available, and a further £79 million for local councils with social services responsibilities.

NHS Doctors (Suspensions)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS doctors have been suspended under the NHS disciplinary procedure in each of the past 10 years, broken down by *(a)* grade and *(b)* speciality. [68228]

Mr. Hutton: Following Health Service Guidelines (HSG(94)49) issued in October 1994, National Health Service trusts routinely report suspensions lasting six months or longer to the Department. Figures are not available for suspensions lasting less than six months. Reliable information is only available for 1999–2001. Information is not held centrally on speciality:

1999	25 individuals whose suspension commenced 1 Jan–31 December 1999	16 consultants 3 specialist registrars 2 staff grade doctors 1 "surgeon" 1 clinical medical officer 1 associate specialist 1 "doctor"
2000	29 new suspensions which commenced during year Jan–Dec 2000	24 consultants 2 senior house officers 1 medical advisor 1 staff grade doctor 1 "doctor"
2001	26 new suspensions which commenced during year Jan–Dec 2001	20 consultants 1 clinical medical officer 1 senior dental officer 2 staff grade doctors 2 specialist registrars

The Department is supporting the managers who are dealing with individual cases. It has seconded a former NHS Trust Human Resources Director to assist employers find ways to ending suspensions as quickly as possible.

NHS Plan

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in developing a comprehensive policy for the National Health Service. [68534]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan published in July 2000, set out a far reaching reform programme to redesign the National Health Service around the needs of the patient.

Delivering the NHS Plan takes that process a stage further, by explaining how the record increases announced in this year's Budget, 7.4 per cent. per annum annual average increases above inflation, for the five years up to 2007–08, will enable us to go further and faster.

NHS Charges

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the services provided by the National Health Service for which charges may be made. [57447]

Mr. Hutton: Treatment provided by the National Health Service is free at the point of delivery except in cases where specific legislation has been passed allowing a charge to be made. The current services for which a charge can be made are:

prescriptions;

dental services;

the supply of optical appliances by the hospital eye service;

private patients;

overseas visitors;

appliances such as wigs and fabric supports.

The NHS can also charge for the provision of accommodation and services for private resident and non-resident patients.

In addition to the above NHS hospitals can charge for certain patient services using income generation powers. However a charge can only be made where the service is considered to be additional treatments over and above the normal service provision. Any item or service that is considered to be an integral part of a patient's treatment by their clinician remains free of charge.

NHS Structural Reorganization

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what structural reorganisations have taken place in the NHS since 1997; and what estimate he has made of the total cost to the NHS of structural reorganisation programmes since 1997. [59093]

Mr. Hutton: We have abolished the internal market and devolved decision making in the National Health Service to the frontline. We have reduced the number of service commissioners from approximately 3,600 in 1997 to approximately 300 in 2002.

The intention to replace general practitioner (GP) fundholding with primary care groups (PCGs) and primary care trusts (PCTs) was announced in the *New NHS: Modern and Dependable* as was the intention to reduce the number of health authorities (HAs) with the responsibility for commissioning services being delegated to PCGs and PCTs. This policy was reinforced by the NHS Plan and *Shifting the Balance of Power.* As a result of the new NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Act, the new health authorities will become strategic health authorities, and the changes to health authorities and PCTs under *Shifting the Balance of Power* will be in place from 1 October 2002.

The number of NHS trusts has reduced through a series of locally led mergers and demergers with a number of community trusts merging with PCTs.

The table shows the change in numbers of organisations and different levels of responsibilities within the NHS since 1 April 1997.

	Service Commisioners		*Service Commissioners and Providers*		*Service Providers*
Year	HAs	GPFHs	PCGs	PCTs	NHS Trusts
1 April 1997	100	3,565	N/A	N/A	425
1 April 1998	100	3,383	N/A	N/A	403
1 April 1999	99	Scheme ended	481	N/A	342

The table shows the change in numbers of organisations and different levels of responsibilities within the NHS since 1 April 1997.

	Service Commisioners	*Service Commissioners and Providers*	*Service Providers*
1 April 2000	99	459	17	326
1 October 2000	95	434	40	326
1 April 2001	95	239	239	318
1 April 2002	28 (note 1)	1	303	274

Note 1:
In practice, commissioning of services has been delegated from HAs to PCTs. HAs will become StHAs in October 2002, subject to the NHS Reform and Health Professions Bill.

The establishment of primary care groups was funded using monies released by the abolition of GP fundholding. The previous Government had set aside an annual budget of £180 million to run fundholding. We have used those monies both to set up PCGs and to improve services to patients. Approximately £150 million additional monies was used following the establishment of PCGs. Approximately £63 million of central funding has been made available to support the establishment of primary care trusts.

The New NHS: Modern and Dependable contained a commitment to deliver £1 billion management costs savings over five years (1997–98 to 2001–02), including £100 million in the first year. The changes as a result of *Shifting the Balance of Power* will release £100 million savings from reducing bureaucracy and this will be placed in a transitional fund in 2002–03 and 2003–04 and used to fund childcare facilities for NHS staff.

NHS Hospital Trust Mergers

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he applies when deciding whether NHS hospital trust mergers may proceed. [67187]

Mr. Hutton: Proposals to merge National Health Service trusts are given careful consideration at all stages to ensure the best interests of patients. Among the criteria considered by my right Hon. Friend, the Secretary of State before agreeing that trust mergers may proceed are:

Assurance that patients' interests are fully safeguarded;

Assurance that clinical quality will be maintained, or improved, uniformly across the whole area;

Evidence derived from the health impact assessment;

Outcome of local public consultation;

Evidence of support for the merger from within the NHS;

Any specific service issues;

Implications for staff;

Financial considerations.

Patient Environment Inspection Programme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the process used to grade hospitals on the 19 elements of the patient environment inspection programme, with specific reference to how each element is weighted in the final assessment. [71861]

Mr. Hutton: Since publication of the NHS Plan, patient environment action teams (PEATs) teams have undertaken four rounds of assessment visits to acute NHS trusts each evaluating performance and progress against 19 separate elements. Scores are combined to produce a rating. Each element of the patient environment was scored on a scale of one to four, where one is poor and four is excellent.

On the question of weighting; whilst every aspect of the assessment is important, we recognise that patients will see some areas as of greater importance than others. For this reason, in determining the final rating a hospital receives, particular attention is paid to the hospital's performance in areas of ward cleanliness, tidiness and decoration and the condition of ward furniture so that defects in these areas are not masked by good performance in other areas of assessment.

The clean hospitals programme has had a clear impact on standards of cleanliness, decoration and supporting services. Hospitals up and down the country have responded magnificently to this, the biggest clean-up campaign in the history of the National Health Service, to the extent that by October last year there were no hospitals in England where cleaning standards were found to be less than acceptable. The latest round of PEAT visits have recently been completed and the results will be available shortly.

MRSA

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 403W, on hospital acquired infection, what plans he has to make representations to the International Classification of Diseases to include MRSA as a distinct code for encoding death registration data. [71349]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* A world health organisation technical group is developing a proposal to use additional codes to identify antimicrobial resistance in infectious diseases. Subject to official ratification, this is likely to lead to an updating of the international classification of diseases.

Hand Hygiene

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of compliance with hand hygiene protocols in NHS hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [71860]

Mr. Hutton: Guidelines on hand hygiene were issued to the National Health Service in January 2000 and trusts are expected to have a policy in place for compliance with hand hygiene which should be audited by the local infection control team. Details of the arrangements in place at each trust are also available to the Commission for Health Improvement as part of its clinical governance review process and to the Audit Commission in their reviews of provider care.

Laundry Facilities

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of laundry and changing facilities in NHS hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [71862]

Mr. Lammy: Laundry and changing facilities/services are arranged by individual hospitals/trusts in relation to their local needs, as are the requirements for storage of linen and laundry

Infection Control

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to *(a)* increase the availability of (i) isolation or (ii) single rooms in NHS hospitals and *(b)* increase the use of barrier nursing with respect to infection control issues. [71865]

Ms Blears: National Health Service hospital trusts are expected to have a policy in place for the isolation of patients with infectious diseases and are responsible for determining the level of provision of isolation and single rooms. The use of isolation facilities and barrier nursing, like other treatment decisions, will depend on the clinical judgement of the local infection control team and the clinicians involved in treating the affected patients.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he plans to NHS infection control policy following the identification of rancomycin resistant staphylococcus aureus in the United States. [72000]

Ms Blears: Vancomycin resistant staphylococcus aureus (VRSA) can be contained by good infection control procedures. The national controls assurance standard already requires trusts to have effective infection control policies therefore no specific policy change is required.

Minimising the development and spread of new strains such as VRSA requires prudent prescribing as well as strict adherence to infection control measures. These are two of the reasons why we are developing targeted action plans for healthcare associated infections and antimicrobial resistance under "Getting Ahead of the Curve", our strategy for combating infectious diseases.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of methicillin resistent staphylococcus aureus were identified in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS region in each of the last six years, including the most recent year for which figures are available. [71842]

Ms Blears: The mandatory reporting of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) bacteraemias by National Health Service acute trusts began in April 2001 and these data are published in the communicable disease report weekly. The first year's data are now available and these form a benchmark for future analysis.

However, data for the last six years on MRSA bacteraemias voluntarily reported to the public health laboratory service by microbiology laboratories are available and these are shown in the table

Laboratory reports of staphylococcus aureus isolated from blood and their susceptibility to methicillin, annual totals 1996–2001.

Laboratory reports of *Staphylococcus aureus* isolated from blood and their susceptibility to methicillin: England, annual totals 1996–2001

	2001			*2000*			*1999*	
	S. aureus	*Methicillin resistant*	*per cent.*	*S. aureus*	*Methicillin resistant*	*per cent.*	*S. aureus*	*Methicillin resistant*	*per cent.*
London	1220	488	40	1078	532	49	1004	450	45
North West	1324	416	31	986	347	35	1077	350	32
South East	1746	728	42	1402	596	43	1250	415	33
West Midlands	1935	811	42	1725	771	45	1153	498	43
Northern and Yorkshire	1648	466	28	916	414	45	708	265	37
Eastern	1462	603	41	1145	487	43	1113	442	40
Trent	1240	441	36	1209	411	34	978	284	29
South West	1277	476	37	909	372	41	897	300	33
England	11852	4429	37	9370	3930	42	8180	3004	37

	1998			*1997*			*1996*		
	S. aureus	*Methicillin resistant*	*per cent.*	*S. aureus*	*Methicillin resistant*	*per cent.*	*S. aureus*	*Methicillin resistant*	*per cent.*
London	1032	420	41	1159	447	39	970	327	34
North West	1070	289	27	1037		0	878	105	12
South East	1307	392	30	1220	335	27	1077	234	22
West Midlands	940	396	42	893	336	38	785	267	34
Northern and Yorkshire	890	280	31	700	143	20	498	36	7
Eastern	994	364	37	766	271	35	674	159	24
Trent	615	189	31	601	154	26	429	58	14
South West	698	191	27	700	191	27	508	87	17
England	7546	2521	33	7076	1877	27	5819	1273	22

Adverse Patient Incidents

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the Serious Hazards of Transfusion report (2000–01); and what strategy he has to reduce the number of mistakes made in patient identity. [73030]

(2) what action he has taken following the SHOT report to adopt new systems and technology to prevent patient identity errors. [73114]

(3) what *(a)* strategies, *(b)* systems and *(c)* technologies he plans to introduce to reduce the number of adverse patient incidents in the NHS; and if he will make a statement; [73045]

(4) if he will make a statement on the Spoonful of Sugar medicine management in NHS hospitals, Audit Commission report of December 2001, and what strategy he has to reduce the human and financial costs of mistakes in the NHS. [73029]

(5) if he will make a statement on the National Patient Safety Agency 17 June report; and what strategy he has for reducing the percentage of NHS hospital admissions that experience adverse incidents caused by human error; [73044]

(6) what estimate he has made of the overall cost to the NHS of adverse patient incidents in each of the last five years for which figures are available; [73115]

(7) what estimate he has made of the number of NHS beds lost due to adverse patient incidents in each of the last five years. [73116]

Mr. Lammy: The Department does not collect information on the number of extended hospital stays as a result of adverse events nor figures on their financial cost. However, as reported in *An Organisation with a Memory*—a report of an expert group on learning from adverse events chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, it is estimated that there may be around 850,000 adverse events each year in the National Health Service which research suggests may lead to three million preventable additional hospital bed days. It is estimated that extended hospital stays as a result of adverse events costs the NHS approximately £2 billion a year.

The Government established the National Patient Safety Agency in July 2001 to improve the safety of NHS patient care by promoting a culture of reporting and learning from adverse events, and to manage the national reporting system to support this function.

By collecting and analysing data on adverse events the agency will be able to identify trends and patterns of avoidable adverse events, provide feedback to organisations to enable them to change their working practices, help develop models of good practice and systems solutions at national level and support ongoing education and learning.

From September 2001 the National Patient Safety Agency ran a pilot in a small sample of trusts designed to test the system for collecting data on adverse incidents and near misses from the NHS.

On 18 June 2002, the National Patient Safety Agency held a conference and presented initial findings of the pilot. The results of the data collection are preliminary and few conclusions can be drawn from this data at this stage. The agency will publish audited figures when they are available. The agency will be working to implement a national reporting system across the NHS from 2003.

This will provide us with a firm evidence base on the scale of the problem and its financial consequences—a baseline allowing us to understand the real extent and nature of adverse events, and act on that knowledge.

The Department has set a specific target which requires the NHS by 2005 to reduce by 40 per cent. the number of serious errors in the use of prescribed drugs. The Department will shortly be publishing a report highlighting processes and individual medicines that are commonly involved in medication errors. The report will also identify a range of measures that professionals and NHS organisations can use to systematically drive down the risk of medication errors across the NHS.

The Department has broadly welcomed the Audit Commission's report on medicines management in NHS hospitals, *A Spoonful of Sugar*. Chief pharmacists and their staff play a key part in medicines management and it is helpful to see this role highlighted. The report reinforces the Department's medicines management performance management framework.

Ms Blears: The fifth report (2000–01) on the serious hazards of transfusion (SHOT) was published on 10 April 2002 and again indicated that blood transfusion in the United Kingdom is very safe, and amongst the safest in the world. Although the number of serious events reported, 315, had increased by 7.5 per cent. this must be seen against a total of over three million blood components transfused annually and increased participation in the scheme. Since the previous report, for 1999–2000, participation in SHOT by National Health Service (NHS) trusts has increased from 72 per cent. to 92 per cent. of all hospitals. We will be looking to SHOT and the new national patient safety agency to help us take a more comprehensive approach to improving patient safety in the NHS.

We are committed to modernising the NHS and working on systems that are shown to reduce error in clinical practice, are safe, and capable of being used effectively and universally. To this aim, there are pilot projects looking to improve the identification of patients and issue of the correct blood. The results will help to inform future research and developments in this area to improve patient care.

In July 2002 new guidance was issued to the NHS on "Better Blood Transfusion—Appropriate Use of Blood" www.doh.gov.uk/publications/coinh.html. This sets out a programme of action for the NHS to; ensure that Better Blood Transfusion is an integral part of NHS care. The guidance includes an objective to improve the safety of the blood transfusion process and calls on the NHS by December 2002, to ensure that policies on patient identification are in place, implemented and monitored throughout the blood transfusion process from prescription, sampling, laboratory testing and issue of blood to collection and administration of blood transfusion.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* technologies and *(b)* systems he plans to introduce in the NHS to reduce the risk of the wrong drugs or inappropriate quantities of drugs being given to patients; and if he will make a statement. [73118]

Mr. Lammy: It is recognised that the manual writing of prescriptions and the manual dispensing of drugs is associated with a significant error rate. Measures to combat this include the following.

In primary care technologies are already in place within general practitioner's (GP's) clinical practice system to help identify the risks involved in prescribing of drugs to patients. PRODIGY is a computer-based decision and learning support system contained within the GP practice system, which offers a series of recommendations in prescribing and organisation of treatment for conditions.

In secondary care information for health the strategy for information services in the National Health Service recommended the introduction of electronic records into all acute trusts. Electronic prescribing systems were specifically mentioned as part of those electronic records. It is intended by 2008 that all acute trusts will have electronic prescribing systems, most acute trusts by 2005. The use of these systems will lead to a reduction in errors that can occur.

In the pharmacy, "Pharmacy in the Future—Implementing the NHS Plan", emphasised the need to re-engineer hospital pharmacy services to be more efficient, timely and safe and more patient focussed. Use of modern automation technology was seen as one way of facilitating this. This was reinforced in the Audit Commission report "A Spoonful of Sugar". Consideration is currently being given to the commissioning of a national specification for automated dispensary systems for the NHS and earmarking of funding for their introduction.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the level of compensation to be budgeted for by the NHS in respect of adverse patient incidents in the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial years. [73117]

Mr. Lammy: Compensation is only paid where there is a liability to do so, and payments are usually made following settlement of clinical negligence claims. According to the National Audit Office Summarised Accounts for the National Health Service (2001) a provision of £4.4 billion was calculated for liabilities relating to all current clinical negligence claims and ones which may arise from incidents which have incurred but not yet been reported. These liabilities will include compensation as well as legal and other costs which are not identified separately in the accounts.

GM Crops

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on recent research regarding genetically modified DNA material from crops finding its way into human stomach bacteria. [72447]

Ms Blears: Research funded by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has demonstrated that the likelihood of gene transfer from genetically modified crops into gut bacteria is extremely low and that fragments of DNA that survive in the gut are too small to change the nature of human gut bacteria.

Reports of the research are published on the FSA web site and copies have been placed in the Library.

Vaccinated Meat

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to prepare *(a)* consumers and *(b)* retailers for the possibility of eating or selling meat that has been vaccinated for foot and mouth disease. [72451]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency has advised that there are no health concerns for consumers from eating meat, milk or other produce from animals vaccinated with any of the foot and mouth disease vaccines that are being considered for possible future use in the United Kingdom. The vaccine cannot infect people. All of the other ingredients in the vaccine are commonly used and do not give rise to safety issues.

Press Office

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* full time equivalents were employed by his press office and *(b)* secondees were placed in his press office in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [70551]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Detailed information on the number of press officers employed by the Department during the financial year 1997–98 and 1998–99 was provided in Appendix II of the report "The Government Information and Communications Service" (HC 770) published by the Select Committee on Public Administration in 29 July 1998. Copies are available in the Library.

The table shows press office staff for January 2000, 2001, 2002

	Jan 2000	*Jan 2001*	*Jan 2002*
No. Staff in Media Centre—Press Officers	16	19	22

Two secondees have been placed in the Department's press office over the last five years.

E-government

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the costs were relating to the Department's websites for the financial year ended March; which company dealt with the website development; and if he will make a statement. [72490]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The cost of the Department's website for the financial year ending March 2002 are shown in the table.

Hosting and maintenance (£0,000)	*Website development and user research (£0,000)*	*Estimated staff costs (£0,00)*	*TOTAL (£0,000)*
73.32	245.9	339.7	658.92

Website development and user research was undertaken by Worth Media and Planetary Tribe respectively in conjunction with Department staff.

The website regularly receives in the region of five million hits per month and is consistently placed in the top six most-visited Government website's.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether it is his policy to ensure that documents referred to in parliamentary answers are available via his Department's website; [72271]

(2) for how long he retains documents referred to in parliamentary answers on his Department's website. [72267]

Mr. Lammy: The Department aims to be as helpful as possible in responding to hon. Members' Questions. Where it is helpful to refer hon. Members to other documents as part of the substantive reply, this may be done by making hard copies of documents available in the Library, or by reference to material available on the Department's website.

The majority of departmental publications are made available on the website through the Publications Library (POINT). The Department current policy is to retain all published online material on our website. This will be reviewed in the context of The Office of the e-Envoy's guidance on archiving websites when available.

The Department complies with minimum requirements set out in the Office of the e-Envoy's *"Guidelines for UK Government Websites"*.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average time taken by his Department to answer questions has been this Session; and if he will make a statement. [70048]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested can only be provided at a disproportionate cost. This is because the Department's Parliamentary database does not readily provide this information, which could only be obtained therefore by a manual count of the records. The Department has received over 10,000 written questions this Session so far. Even to perform the calculations on a reasonable sample would incur a disproportionate cost. A new database is being developed for the next session that should be able to provide this kind of management information on a routine basis.

The Department fully recognises the need to ensure that hon. Members receive prompt, timely and helpful replies to their questions. Ministers make every effort to ensure that this important instrument of accountability is given the priority that it needs and deserves. Where there are regrettable delays in answering questions this stems from a proper desire to maintain high standards of accuracy and helpfulness in replies. We will, however, continue to strive to make further progress with the equally important yardstick of timeliness.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Azerbaijan

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will seek the co-operation of British companies engaged in oil exploration in Azerbaijan in assisting that country to deal with refugees; and if she will make a statement. [61600]

Clare Short: Resolution of the refugee problem in Azerbaijan is ultimately dependent on a political settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh dispute with Armenia, which would permit resettlement of those displaced by the conflict.

My Department is currently funding a number of activities in Azerbaijan which seek to encourage greater responsibility from the private sector in ensuring that the benefits of their activities are widely shared.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution her Department is making to the efforts to achieve quality epidemiology and behavioural surveillance in the fight against AIDS in Asia. [67481]

Clare Short: We are supporting major HIV/AIDS programmes in six countries in the Asia: China, India, Cambodia, Vietnam, Nepal, and Bangladesh. We are also considering programmes in other countries eg. Pakistan and Burma.

In all cases a critical component of that work is more effective epidemiology and enhanced behavioural surveillance, particularly in the two most populous countries of China and India. We are seeking to integrate such activities into national programmes and thereby enable improved chances for sustainability.

Due to the weaknesses in knowledge about the nature and scale of epidemic, this is key to organising a more effective response to HIV/AIDS in the region.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's plans to target resources at supporting HIV/AIDS projects in developing nations. [67866]

Clare Short: My Department's plans for supporting HIV/AIDS projects are outlined in the *HIV/AIDS Strategy Paper* which was published in May 2001. A copy is in the Library of the House.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 883–886W, what is meant by rights-based response to HIV/AIDS in Nepal; and if she will make a statement. [73294]

Clare Short: The UK has contributed £1.6 million to assist the Government of Nepal to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS into the general population, through interventions to stabilise and contain the concentrated epidemic among female sex workers and injecting drug users. These are vulnerable groups that are often harassed, stigmatised and have restricted access to services. The rights-based approach recognises the need to protect them from further marginalisation and discrimination, and to uphold their rights with regards to privacy, health and education.

The UK is also assisting the Government of Nepal with the development of its HIV/AIDS strategy for the next five years, and plans to make more resources available to implement the strategy.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had recently with representatives of the Government of Yugoslavia about refugees within Yugoslavia. [67184]

Clare Short: Assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia falls under the remit of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the European Commission Humanitarian Affairs Office (ECHO). We are supporting the work of these agencies by contributing significant amounts of funds, including 19.7 per cent. of the €69.3 million ECHO budget (made up of €47.8 million to Rep. of Serbia, €14 million to Kosovo and €7.5 million to Rep. of Montenegro).

In addition to this, we are working very closely with the Yugoslav and Serbian authorities on a programme of social and economic reforms that will help to improve the living conditions of the poorest people in the FRY, including refugees and IDPs. We are funding a £3.2 million programme of social policy reforms that will strengthen the delivery of social welfare, health, employment and education services in Serbia. We are also working closely with the World Bank on a major social services adjustment credit that will enable the Serbian authorities to make further progress in these areas.

These plans are described in detail in our Country Strategy Paper for the FRY, which is available in the library of the House.

Nepal

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the situation with regard to food and water security in rural Nepal. [63478]

Clare Short: Food insecurity in Nepal is severe and is greatest in the hill and mountain regions. There is growing concern over a possible humanitarian crisis emerging in the mid- and far-west regions of Nepal due to the initial failure of this year's monsoon in these areas.

The situation is being made worse by the conflict. The Maoists have looted food intended for development programmes, but more seriously the army has imposed food restrictions in at least 8 districts, preventing traders from going into the hills and severely restricting the food individuals can carry. The harvest is already down in these areas because of the late monsoon, and because men did not return from seasonal work in India to take part in planting. Fear of both Maoists and security forces was the key factor. With little accurate information currently available, DFID will support more intensive monitoring by the World Food Programme.

As regards water security, access to drinking water is not a major problem though the safety of this water is questionable. DFID is currently supporting programmes to enhance water supply and sanitation across rural Nepal.

Millennium Development Goals

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she estimates that, as a result of the G8 talks, the UK is on target to meet its millennium development goals; and if she will make a statement. [72849]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) on 7 May, *Official Report*, column 15W. The G8 Summit focoused on the challenges facing Africa where least progress is being made. It produced valuable commitments of support for Africa in promoting peace and security; providing education for all; tackling HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and overcoming the burden of unpayable debt. If African Governments deliver strong policy commitments, Africa can expect at least an additional
$6 billion a year in development assistance, as a result of the Summit, to help accelerate its progress there towards the Goals.

Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals is monitored globally by the UN Department for Social and Economic Affairs, using data provided by a range of international bodies and country governments. UN country teams lead on country-level reporting, co-ordinated by UNDP.

Commodity Prices

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the UK intends to do with other Governments to address the effect of international commodity prices in Johannesburg. [69478]

Clare Short: There are no proposals for a statement on commodity prices at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

The prices of a number of internationally traded commodities have fallen dramatically in recent years. This has had an effect in producer countries at the household level (e.g. ability to purchase food and medicines) as well as at a higher, national, level (e.g. in terms of foreign exchange earnings, debt repayment ability etc.).

Many of the poorest countries, particularly in Africa, remain dependent on a narrow range of commodity exports. We are committed to helping commodity dependent exporting countries reduce their vulnerability to the effects of world commodity prices.

The UK, through its development programme and other endeavours at the international level, is supporting a range of actions that seek to expand the trade opportunities of these countries in order to reduce their dependence on primary agricultural commodity exports. Existing trade barriers (including tariff escalation) are a major impediment to this. The UK is not only working to secure reform of international trade rules in general but also to reduce the impact of protectionist regimes such as the Common Agricultural Policy.

There is scope for creating a more favourable domestic environment within commodity dependent countries themselves. This is necessary to generate the economic growth and other conditions that contribute to developing the means by which they can reduce their vulnerability to external shocks such as unfavourable price movements. The UK provides support to a variety of activities in this regard. These range from actions to enable local institutions to become more efficient and innovative,

through to securing improvements in the regulatory framework in order to facilitate the development of local enterprises and attract foreign investment.

World Trade Organisation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to enable poor countries fully to participate in meetings of the World Trade Organisation. [66185]

Clare Short: During the normal course of WTO business in Geneva, there can be 26–40 meetings per week which some countries must cover with a delegation of 2–3 people, while others have no representation in Geneva and must follow the issues from their capital. The Ministerial Declaration at Doha made wide-ranging commitments to trade-related capacity-building for poor countries, and stated that

"priority shall . . . be accorded to Members and Observers without representation in Geneva".

To meet that commitment, a task force was appointed by interested Ministers to examine the feasibility of expanding an existing organisation, the Agency for International Trade Information and Cooperation (AITIC) into an inter-governmental organisation with a wider mandate than at present. AITIC is a Swiss NGO which has since 1998 been supporting countries with little or no representation in Geneva by drafting briefing notes on difficult issues, offering a neutral forum for discussion, organising workshops and training seminars, running an "early warning system" on key issues, etc. The UK strongly supports this work and has made a commitment of £1m to support the first phase of AITIC's work as an IGO. This forms part of the UK's overall commitment to allocate £45m (of which £38 million has already been committed) to trade-related capacity-building work between 1998 and 2003.

Development Funds

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will provide a breakdown of her Department's expenditure since 1998–99 on the African Development Fund; [67510]

(2) if she will provide a breakdown of her Department's expenditure since 1998–99 on the Caribbean Development Fund. [67506]

Clare Short: The figures requested are available in *Statistics on International Development (SID)*, Table 8 which shows a breakdown of gross public expenditure on multilateral contributions for the last five financial years.

A copy of this publication is available in the Library of the House.

Liberia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how she has responded to the appeal by the UNHCR for emergency assistance for Liberian refugees; and if she will make a statement; [68826]

(2) if she will make a statement on the abduction of UNHCR nurses from the Sinje refugee camp in Liberia by LURD rebels. [68827]

Clare Short: My Department is considering UNHCR's appeal for emergency support for Liberian refugees. I am informed that five Liberian nurses working for the non-governmental organisation MERCI were abducted from Sinje refugee camp in north-west Liberia on 20 June. Their abduction from the UNHCR-run camp, where they provided healthcare to residents, followed attacks on the camp by LURD rebels. Despite attempts by UNHCR and others to locate and secure the release of the nurses, their whereabouts is still unknown.

Basic Education Project, Nigeria

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial support her Department is giving in 2002–03 to the Universal Basic Education Project in Nigeria. [65756]

Clare Short: In support of the Federal Government of Nigeria's efforts to achieve Universal Basic Education, the Department for International Development has funded the Support to Education Sector Analysis and Planning Project. This £556,000 project is providing assistance to Nigeria for their implementation of Universal Basic Education.

In addition to this, my department is at present collaborating closely with the World Bank towards the development of a programme of Technical Assistance that will assist Nigeria in working towards the achievement of the Universal Basic Education Millennium Goal. This proposal will be submitted to Senior Management for approval within the next few weeks.

Sudan

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what efforts have been made to support the peace process in Sudan under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Authority of Drought *(a)* through diplomatic means and *(b)* through financial assistance. [69231]

Clare Short: The UK has engaged fully and been present as an observer throughout the latest round of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) peace talks from 17 June to 20 July in Machakos, Kenya. To date we have provided £101,119 in financial support to the IGAD secretariat.

Overseas Superannuation

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money was spent by her Department in each year since 1998–99 on overseas superannuation, referred to on page 98 of the 2002 departmental report. [73131]

Clare Short: Details of Overseas Superannuation expenditure for each year to 2000–01 are given in line two of Table 1 on page 98 of the Departmental Report 2002.

Kenya

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what (1) discussions her Department has had with the UNHCR regarding the protection afforded to refugees in Kenya and the security of refugee camps in Kenya; and if she will make a statement. [73275]

(2) if she will make a statement on the UNHCR's resettlement policy in East Africa, with specific reference to Kenya; [73277]

(3) what links her Department has with the UNHCR offices in Kenya; [73279]

(4) what discussions her Department has had with (a) the UNHCR, (b) the Kenyan Government and (c) refugees in Kenya regarding the resettlement of refugees in Kenya; [73276]

(5) what action she has taken to counter corruption in the Kenyan office of the UNHCR; [73280]

(6) what the UNHCR has spent in the last 12 months in Kenya. [73278]

Clare Short: The UNHCR programme in Kenya currently assists a refugee population of over 213,000; 129,000 of whom are Somalis and 70,000 are Sudanese. The cost of the programme was over $25.2 million in 2001 (see table below), and has a budget of $18.1 million in 2002.

UNHCR's programme aims to provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees in Kenya while exploring durable solutions to assist refugees, mainly voluntary repatriation to their country of origin.

Unfortunately local integration of refugees is extremely limited, due to limited freedom of movement, access to resources, markets and job opportunities. In addition, continued conflict in refugees' countries of origin seriously limits opportunities for repatriation. As a result, UNHCR's main activities, in cooperation with the Government of Kenya (as well as WFP, UNICEF and UNESCO), have been in providing asylum for refugees by guaranteeing their legal protection and physical security; as well as offering income generating activities, refugee employment, education, vocational training and healthcare. UNHCR also offers assistance to refugees who wish to voluntarily repatriate themselves.

The hon. Lady's second question asked if the Secretary of State will make a statement on the UNHCR's resettlement policy in East Africa, with specific reference to Kenya. [73277]

UNHCR's resettlement policy in East Africa, as elsewhere, is to help refugees with particular refugee needs and concerns over repatriation and local integration, to seek asylum in third countries. DFID has not discussed resettlement with UNHCR, the Kenyan Government or refugees.

The hon. Lady's third question asked what links the Secretary of State's Department has with the UNHCR offices in Kenya. [73279]

DFID contributed £550,000 in 2000–01 and a similar amount in 2001–02 to UNHCR's programme in Kenya.

DFID staff based in London and Nairobi undertook a monitoring mission on the UNHCR Kenya programme in January 2000.

The hon. Lady's fourth question asked what discussions the Secretary of State's Department has had with (a) the UNHCR, (b) the Kenyan Government and (c) refugees in Kenya regarding the resettlement of refugees in Kenya. [73276]

Both DFID and BHC officials in Nairobi are in regular contact with UNHCR Kenya. We continue to monitor closely the refugee situation in the established camps and the border areas of Kenya through regular dialogue with UNHCR officials and other concerned agencies.

The hon. Lady's fifth question asked what action the Secretary of State has taken to counter corruption in the Kenyan offices of the UNHCR. [73280]

Allegations of corruption in UNHCR's offices in Kenya led to the security section of UNHCR undertaking an investigation in December 1999. The report, issued in June 2000, did not substantiate the allegations but recommended further investigation take place. While UNHCR branch officers in Nairobi were following up the allegations, threats were made against three officers. This led to the Inspector General of UNHCR calling in the UN Office of Investigation and Oversight Services (OIOS) in October 2000 to conduct an investigation.

The findings of the OIOS investigation suggested that outside expertise was needed. Hence in December OIOS approached 4 donor governments (including the UK) to provide qualified staff to participate in an international investigation task force. DFID provided (on secondment) the services of a Detective Chief Inspector. The UK cost of this secondment was £13,117. Overseas costs were met by UNHCR.

The hon. Lady's sixth question asked if the Secretary of State will provide a breakdown of the UNHCR's spending in Kenya. [73278]

The table below lists UNHCR's expenditure in Kenya for the period 2000–01.

	$
Protection, monitoring and co-ordination	1,884,948
Community services	306,195
Crop production	5,062
Domestic needs/ household support	1,133,801
Education	1,033,720
Food	103,645
Forestry	146,633
Health / nutrition	1,833,852
Income generation	52,598
Legal assistance	1,392,474
Operational support to agencies	2,232,028
Sanitation	64,287
Shelter / other infrastructure	466,866
Transport / logistics	1,180,706
Water	628,294
Transit accounts	4,193
Instalments with implementing partners	3,405,684
Programme Support	7,881,027
Unliquidated obligations	1,468,447
Total	25,244,460

Source:
UNHCR Global report 2001 (page 171).

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last visited Kenya; whom she met; what discussions she had; and when she next intends to visit Kenya. [73274]

Clare Short: I last made a substantive visit to Kenya in August 1998. I have visited the country very briefly on a number of occasions since then. I have no specific plans to visit again. The Under-Secretary visited Kenya earlier this month as part of her own induction programme. She met a wide range of people, including the Minister of Finance, and visited programmes supported by DFID. Her

discussions focused on the prospects for poverty reduction in Kenya, and how the international community, including DFID, can best support Kenya's efforts to achieve it.

Human Rights (Rwanda)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what activities are being undertaken in *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* Burundi by her Department to improve the human rights situation; and if she will make a statement. [73010]

Clare Short: DFID is the largest bilateral donor to Rwanda providing £30 million a year. Our programme is set within the framework of a Memorandum of Understanding which includes commitments in areas such as human rights and governance.

The human rights situation in Rwanda has improved for the majority of individuals since 1997. The establishment of the Human Rights Commission and the Commission for National Unity and Reconciliation are evidence of the Government of Rwanda's commitment to eliminating human rights abuses and to the reconciliation process. The Government have held successful local level elections in 2001 supported by DFID, but the end of the transitional period brings new challenges as Rwanda moves towards full national elections in 2003. DFID are supporting work to draft a new constitution.

We believe that the Government's commitment to end the cycle of ethnic tension, to maintain stability within Rwanda, to eliminate poverty and improve the lives of all Rwandans is genuine and their policies are moving them in the right direction. However, we monitor closely reports of human rights abuses and raise our concerns with GoR accordingly.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will provide support for the British Council's plans to develop its programmes in support of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. [73196]

Clare Short: The British Council's funding is provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Any plans for developing programmes in support of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) would therefore be for the FCO's consideration.

Land Reform Programmes

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries in which her Department supports land reform programmes. [73282]

Clare Short: In the current financial year DFID is supporting land reform activities in the countries listed below. Further details of these projects are available from the Department's on-line database at www.narsis.org. Please note that in the last two cases—South Africa (where we provided an earlier phase of support), and the SADC region, our support to land reform is currently in the design stage.

Bangladesh	Kyrgyzstan	Rwanda
Croatia	Moldova	Ukraine
Guyana	Mozambique	South Africa
Kenya	Russia	SADC

The hon. Lady's second question asked if the Secretary of State will list the countries in which her Department operates a sector wide approach to development. [73283]

My Department supports one or more sector wide approaches in a number of aid dependent Low Income Countries, including in Bangladesh, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

The hon. Lady's third question asked what the Secretary of State is doing to promote good government in Ethiopia. [73287]

We are currently developing a partnership with the Ethiopian Government and as part of this process we are formulating our Country Assistance Plan for Ethiopia. Our Plan will be based on the Ethiopian Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which includes a commitment to good governance. We are considering support through our programme for Civil Service Reform and capacity building of local government. We also have a Partnership Fund, which has the objective of increasing awareness, accountability and responsiveness of government to the public and civil society.

The hon. Lady's fourth question asked what assistance the Secretary of State's Department has provided *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* multilaterally to the EPRDF in Ethiopia in each of the last five years. [73284]

The DFID bilateral programme has not provided any financial or technical assistance to the EPRDF in any of the last five years. We are not aware of any specific multilateral contributions direct to the EPRDF.

The hon. Lady's fifth question asked what steps the Secretary of State's Department is taking to encourage Ethiopia to fulfil its obligations under the Convention of the Child. [73285]

Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which has been signed by Ethiopia, is monitored by the Committee of the Rights of the Child, who examine reports submitted by States' such as Ethiopia. Under the CRC, UNICEF has a legal obligation to promote and protect child rights by supporting the work of the Committee. DFID has been supporting UNICEF to increase its capacity to apply human rights principles and the provisions of the Convention in the design and implementation of its programmes. UNICEF has been testing out rights-based programming in East Africa including Ethiopia. DFID is also funding a project to rehabilitate street children into their communities and to raise awareness of children's issues in Addis Ababa.

Reproductive Health Programmes

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 883–886W, how much money her Department has given in support of the Russian Family Planning Association per annum since 1997; what that represents in percentage terms of her Department's per annum expenditure for population

reproductive health programmes; if she will explain the makeup of the Russian Family Planning Association; and if she will make a statement. [73183]

Clare Short: My Department funded the International Planned Parenthood Federation's (IPPF) European Network to provide technical assistance to the Russian Family Planning Association (RFPA) from March 1995 to June 2002. The purpose of our support has been to ensure that accurate information about reproductive health is disseminated in Russia, through the leadership of the RFPA. The total value of funding provided to IPPF during this period has been £390,000, over two project phases. Annual expenditure since 1997 has been as follows:

FY 1997–1998—£23,567

FY 1998–1999—£39,001

FY 1999–2000—nil

FY 2000–2001—£54,351

FY 2001–2002—£140,370

FY 2002–2003—£55,000 (expected)

My Department spent approximately £206 million on sexual and reproductive health in financial year 2001–02. My Department's expenditure on this project in that year therefore represents less than 0.07 per cent. of annual expenditure. The RFPA is a non-governmental organisation, based in Moscow. My Department reviewed this project in January 2002 and concluded that its purpose was likely to be largely achieved. No further assistance to the RFPA is planned.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 883–886W, how much money her Department has given to the *(a)* health and sexual education programme in Bolivia since 1997 and *(b)* Orissa Reproductive Health Project in India in each year since 1997; what these amounts represent in percentage terms of her Department's per annum expenditure for population reproductive health programmes; and if she will make a statement. [73172]

Clare Short: My Department has spent the following amounts on each project listed since 1997. Expenditure has also been expressed as a percentage of DFID's annual spend on sexual and reproductive health activities in each year;

£ actuals	*1997–98*		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
	Spend	% of annual Reproductive Health spend	Spend	% of annual Reproductive Health spend	Spend	% of annual Reproductive Health spend	Spend	% of annual Reproductive Health spend
Health and Sexual Education Programme, Bolivia	629,943	1.6	482,458	1.1	718,940	0.9	1,162,010	0.9
Orissa Reproductive Health Project, India	287,386	0.7	475,214	1.1	409,765	0.5	422,428	0.3

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 883–886W, how much money her Department has given to *(a)* the reproductive health programme in Peru, *(b)* the STD programme in the Russian Federation and *(c)* the Central American regional programme for improving sexual and reproductive health services in each year since 1997; what these amounts represent in percentage terms of her Department's per annum expenditure for population reproductive health programmes; and if she will make a statement. [73184]

Clare Short: My Department has spent the following amounts on each of the programmes listed since 1997. Expenditure has also been expressed as a percentage of DFID's annual spend on sexual and reproductive health activities in each year;

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*	
£ actuals	Value	% of Annual Reproductive Health Spend	Value	% of Annual Reproductive Health Spend	Value	% of Annual Reproductive Health Spend	Value	% of Annual Reproductive Health Spend
Reproductive Health Programme, Peru	1,020,190	2.6	1,034,011	2.3	966,677	1.3	533,948	0.4
STD Programme, Russian Federation	-	-	388,707	0.8	150,019	0.2	207,896	0.2
Central American Regional Programme on Sexual and Reproductive Health	-	-	-	-	-	-	323,170	0.2

Radioactive Floodwaters

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent reports she has received for assistance for containing radioactive floodwaters in Kyrgystan and Uzbekistan; and how she proposes to respond to them. [61860]

Clare Short: No reports have been received, but my Officials have recently obtained a World Bank commissioned technical assessment on landslide and uranium tailings problems and options for remediation in Kyrgyzstan. My Department has not been asked to respond to the technical assessment.

Lebanon

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assistance she has given to the Government of Lebanon for the re-building of its infrastucture; and if she will make a statement. [73016]

Clare Short: My Department has a very small bilateral development assistance programme in Lebanon. We contribute to multilateral institutions (including the World Bank, IMF and EC) which are implementing larger programmes in Lebanon. The Government of Lebanon would be able to raise any issue of concern with these institutions directly.

Biotechnology Research Projects

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what biotechnology research projects in *(a)* agriculture and *(b)* biomedics have been supported by her Department; and what public investment has gone into them in each of the last three years. [73238]

Clare Short: Separate data are not maintained of the many projects using biotechnology techniques for research purposes.

Biotechnology research projects in agriculture and related disciplines involving the potential release of genetically modified organisms in developing countries, and studies on genetic modification issues, are listed on the DFID website www.dfid.gov.uk. Expenditure on these projects in the last three years was: 1999–2000 £645,136; 2000–01 £767,479; 2001–02 £873,516.

A briefing note on genetically modified organisms and developing countries is also on the website.

DFID invests in biomedical research to develop new drugs, vaccines and other products to prevent disease in developing countries.

Since 2001, £1.5 million has been invested in the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative. The Medicines for Malaria Venture has been given £1 million a year over the last three years to expedite discovery of the next generation of anti-malarial drugs.

Through the UK Medical Research Council (MRC), DFID began funding a five year £16 million Microbicides Development Programme in the current financial year. In addition, DFID's concordat with the MRC involves a contribution in excess of £4 million a year to their research portfolio which includes basic biomedical research relevant to the health of poor people in developing countries.

DFID's contribution of about £10 million a year to the World Health Organisation includes funds for its tropical diseases research programme. This funding is not earmarked and data are not available of the exact sums going to the programme and the amounts used for biomedical research.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the EU Committee for the implementation of the Regulation establishing an Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-accession is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [73160]

Clare Short: The next meeting of the EU Committee of the Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-accession (ISPA) is due to take place in October 2002; the exact date has yet to be decided.

Schedule 5 of the 1998 Scottish Act sets out areas of policy that are reserved, that is, where responsibility has not been devolved to the Scottish Executive. Section 7 (1) of Schedule 5 states:

"International relations, including relations with territories outside the United Kingdom, the European Communities (and their institutions) and other organisations, regulation of international trade, and international development assistance and co-operation are reserved matters."

The United Kingdom is represented on the ISPA Committee by officials from the Department for International Development and the United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the European Commission.

Deforestation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's policy is on deforestation. [73281]

Clare Short: Deforestation is a serious problem in many countries but it affects people in different ways and is not always harmful. It is driven by many factors that vary in nature and scale from place to place. Some of these factors, such as unsustainable timber extraction, are linked to the forest sector while others, such as agricultural and energy policies, lie outside the forest sector.

Each country has a particular set of circumstances, in terms both of the direct and underlying causes of deforestation and of the scope for action in addressing them. My Department works with developing countries to address the underlying causes of deforestation in the context of their national forest programmes and wider strategies for sustainable development. We have also supported work by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forest on the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation.

Commission on Intellectual Property Rights

Bob Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) when the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights was established; what it's terms of Reference are; who its members are and on what occassions it has meet. [72057]

(2) when she expects the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights to report. [72056]

Clare Short: The Commission was established on 8 May 2001.

Details of the terms of reference, Commission members and meetings can be found on the CIPR website at: www.iprcommission.org.

The Commission's report will be published on 12 September 2002. I will place copies in the Library of the House.

The Department for International Development answered the following questions by letter during the Whitsun recess in May and June 2002

Middle East

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answers of 9 May, 2002, *Official Report*, column 290W, on humanitarian assistance (Middle East), what the UK contribution to European Union and World Bank activities in the Territories Controlled by the Palestinian Authority was in each of the past 10 years, broken down by *(a)* monetary value, *(b)* percentage of activity total and *(c)* percentage of her Department's annual spending total; and if she will make a statement. [58334]

Clare Short: The UK contribution to the European Commission is given in the table:

Year	UK share of EC assistance to Palestinians (£ millions)	UK share as percentage of total EC Palestinian Activities	UK share as a percentage of UK Official Development Assistance
1994	12.8	15.0	0.6
1995	15.3	16.0	0.8
1996	11.5	14.5	0.6
1997	12.9	14.3	0.7
1998	14.7	19.1	0.8
1999	15.4	17.8	0.8
2000	26.8	19.0	1.2

The UK contribution to the World Bank is given in the table below

Year	UK Share of World Bank Disbursements to the West Bank and Gaza Strip (£ millions)	UK share as a percentage of the World Bank's Trust Fund for the West Bank and Gaza Strip	UK share as a percentage of UK Official Development Assistance
1995	0.4	5	0.02
1996	0.7	5	0.04
1997	1.4	5	0.08
1998	1.7	5	0.09
1999	0.9	5	0.04
2000	1.2	5	0.05
2001	1.0	5	0.04

The European Commission (EC) and World Bank programmes did not commence until 1994 and 1995 respectively. EC Data for 2001 has not yet been confirmed. The figures are calculated using approximate exchange rates for Euros and US Dollars. The percentage figure for our share of World Bank spending is an average of the various Bank instruments.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support Her Majesty's Government are providing in the rebuilding of Angola. [58913]

Clare Short: We have been following events in Angola closely. We strongly welcome recent moves towards peace and the agreement signed in Luanda on 4 April, which established a ceasefire after 30 years of civil war. A lasting peace is the key to development in Angola which is a country of enormous economic potential whose people are living in desperate poverty.

We are working with Angola bilaterally, as well as with our international partners and the United Nations. The humanitarian situation remains critical. And there is an urgent need to provide relief to the Unita fighters and their families gathered in the Quartering Areas. We are encouraging the UN to engage and the international community and Angolan Government to provide more resources for the relief effort. The UK will continue to play its part in meeting urgent humanitarian needs. DFID also has a small development assistance programme focused on long term poverty reduction for the large numbers of people, forced by the conflict, to migrate into urban areas. This totalled £2 million in the last financial year.

I undertook on my visit to Luanda to discuss Angola's situation with the IMF and World Bank and did so with Jim Wolfensohn and Horst Kohler and their staff at the spring meetings in Washington. We will continue to work to encourage reform so that the rich natural resources of Angola are used for the benefit of its people.

Angola

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the humanitarian situation in Angola; what emergency aid is *(a)* being delivered and *(b)* planned by her Department; and if she will make a statement. [58909]

Clare Short: My Department continues to monitor closely the humanitarian situation in Angola, which remains serious. Millions of Angolans are living under life threatening conditions and humanitarian agencies are working at full capacity to alleviate the worst aspects of the humanitarian crisis in the country.

We recently contributed £1 million to the 2002 United Nations Inter Agency Consolidated Appeal for Angola to ensure that critical needs are met and gaps in humanitarian assistance are covered during the sudden onset of emergencies. We also recently contributed £300,000 toward the International Red Cross country appeal for 2002 and £450,000 toward Medecins Sans Frontieres emergency health and sanitation programmes in Kuito, one of the worst effected areas in the country.

We are planning to spend some £2 million on humanitarian aid during the current financial year. We are also examining the potential for a specific DFID contribution to assist with the demobilisation of UNITA fighters.

Her Majesty's Government remains in close contact with the Government of Angola and international partners. We will remain at the forefront of diplomatic and political efforts to ensure that the internationals system engages effectively with the Government of Angola to deliver humanitarian aid more effectively, so that the peace process is reinforced.

Central Asia

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department *(a)* pledged and *(b)* delivered to (i) Kazakhstan, (ii) Kyrgyzstan, (iii) Tajikistan, (iv) Turkmenistan and (v) Uzbekistan in each year from 1997 to September 2001; how much has been *(A)* pledged and *(B)* delivered to each country since September 2001; and if she will make a statement. [59808]

Clare Short: Figures up to September 2001 are not readily available as the department's records are maintained on a financial year basis as follows:

	1997/98	*1998/99*	*1999/2000*	*2000/01*
£ thousand	pledged/ delivered	pledged/ delivered	pledged/ delivered	pledged/ delivered
Kazakhstan	2,000/2,145	1,500/1,345	1,500/1,082	1,170/908
Kyrgyzstan	600/528	650/442	1,100/1,223	2,000/1,509
Tajikistan	100/24	100/732	130/45	100/640
Turkmenistan	200/240	300/194	200/97	100/111
Uzbekistan	700/586	700/592	500/505	220/484

In addition, the following was provided through Multilateral Organisations (calendar year):

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Kazakhstan	1,900	2,300	1,700	1,300
Kyrgyzstan	11,600	9,100	2,800	5,900
Tajikistan	3,000	4,900	2,700	3,900
Turkmenistan	500	800	700	400
Uzbekistan	1,200	1,700	2,000	1,600

Amounts pledged and delivered to each country since September 2001 are not readily available. Allocations for 2002/2003 financial year are:

Kazakhstan	800
Kyrgyzstan	3,500
Tajikistan	500
Turkmenistan	100
Uzbekistan	500

East Timor

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department has *(a)* pledged and *(b)* delivered to (i) the new Government of East Timor, (ii) non-Governmental organisations in East Timor, (iii) multi-lateral programmes specifically aimed at East Timor and (iv) multi-lateral programmes including East Timor; and if she will make a statement. [58910]

Clare Short: Britain, together with the wider international community, remains committed to helping secure sustainable and equitable development for East Timor and its people. We are the fourth largest bilateral donor. Details of commitments and disbursements to East Timor for the period 1999 to 2005 are as follows:

Activity	*Commitment 1999–2005 £*	*Disbursed £*
United Nations: 1999 ballot	800,000	800,000
Humanitarian and Emergency Relief	6,500,000	6,500,000
United Nations Transitional Administration	4,500,000	4,500,000
United Nations: Support for 2001 Elections	500,000	500,000
World Bank Trust Fund (infrastructure)	8,000,000	8,000,000
Support for Developing the National Development Plan (NDP)	300,000	-
NDP Implementation 2002–2005	12,000,000	-
OXFAM: Human Resource Development	1,890,000	590,000
Civil Society and International NGOs	67,831	25,809
Local Civil Society Organisations	450,000	94,579
UK share of European Commission Expenditure, 1999–2005*	19,728,000	14,200,000
Total	54,735,831	35,210,388

*Estimated UK attribution at 19 per cent. of EU expenditure in East Timor

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the value was of CDC investments in agribusiness in *(a)* Africa and *(b)* China in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000 and (iv) 2001, (A) in money terms and (B) as a proportion of all new investments; and if she will make a statement. [55990]

Clare Short: The value of CDC's new investments in agribusiness in Africa and China over the last four years is shown below, along with their proportion in relation to all new investments.

(A) value in £m	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Africa	14	6.1	6.2	0.6
China	0	0	0	0

(B) as proportion of total of all new investments

Africa	6.2%	2.2%	2.4%	0.4%
China	0	0	0	0

CDC has no agribusiness investments in China.

UN Commission on Human Rights

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the UK Government have provided to the UN Commission on Human Rights for each of the last five years. [58629]

Clare Short: DFID provides strategic support to the OHCHR through an Institutional Strategic Partnership. The partnership runs from January 2000 to December 2002 and to date we have provided £3.4 million. The objectives of the partnership are to enhance the capacity of OHCHR in order to support the development and management of its field programmes and operations; to mainstream all human rights across the work of the UN system; to integrate economic, social and cultural rights into its work; and to provide human rights information to other implementing agencies. In order to ensure that the OHCHR is able to comply with the mandates given to the OHCHR at the Commission on Human Rights, and that the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights operate efficiently, DFID includes the servicing of these special procedures in its support to the central capacity of the OHCHR.

Southern Africa

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what actions Her Majesty's Government are undertaking to extend the availability of affordable anti-AIDS/HIV drugs in Southern Africa. [58914]

Clare Short: The Government are supporting an expanding programme to combat HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa (South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland). Part of this involves strengthening South Africa's lead on essential drugs for the South African Development Community, and strengthening the essential drugs programme in South Africa to improve legislation, procurement and pricing for HIV/AIDS and other drugs.

We are also taking action at a global level. The Working Group on Access to Medicines, which I chair, is working with the pharmaceutical industry, foundations, developing countries and the World Health Organisation, World Trade Organisation and the European Commission to look at the feasibility of a global differential pricing mechanism for essential medicines. But the Government recognises that affordability is only one of four key factors that influence access to medicines. Others are the need for sustainable financing, the rational selection and use of existing drugs and reliable health and supply systems.

On sustainable financing we have pledged $200 million over 5 years to the Global Fund to Fight TB, AIDS and Malaria (GFATM), of which South Africa is already a beneficiary and to which other countries in the region have access. We have also committed over £1 billion since 1997 to strengthening developing countries' health systems, building their capacity both to deliver medicines to the poor and to make effective choices about the selection and use of drugs.

EC Advisory Committees

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the mandate of the Committee on Economic Aid to the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe and for the Co-ordination of Aid to the Candidate Countries under the Pre-accession Strategy Phase is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55387]

Clare Short: There are two relevant committees; they cover the EC's PHARE (originally: Poland and Hungary Assistance for the Reconstruction of the Economy) and ISPA (Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession) programmes. The mandate of the PHARE Committee is to oversee the implementation of Council Regulation EEC Number 3906 of 18 December 1989, which established PHARE, and its subsequent amendments. The ISPA Committee oversees the implementation of Council Regulation EC Number 1267–1999, which established ISPA. They determine the strategy framework for PHARE and ISPA, and approve annual and multi-annual allocations to country and regional programmes.

The PHARE Committee has met eight times in the last year, the ISPA Committee, three times. The UK is represented by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the UK Permanent Representation to the European Commission.

The annual cost to public funds of the Committee's work principally comprises the work of DFID officials in assessing and discussing with the EC strategy and programme proposals, as well as the costs of attendance at meetings of the Committees. The precise amounts concerned are not readily available.

The items most recently considered under the Phare Committee were: the final part of the 2002 National Programme for Slovenia, the OLAF (European Anti-Fraud Office) 2002 Multi-Beneficiary Programme and the SIGMA (Support for Improvement in Governance and Management) 2002 Multi-Beneficiary Programme. The ISPA Committee recently considered a range of nineteen environment and seven transport projects across the range of Candidate countries.

Pre-accession programmes and/or work related to them are subject to scrutiny by Select Committees of Parliament. Under Council Decision 1999/468/EC the EC has undertaken to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first such report was deposited in the libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685/02). We have encouraged the EC to make available on its website a record of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the mandate of the Committee on the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law and on the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55384]

Clare Short: The Human Rights and Democracy Committee is a Management Committee composed of Representatives of European Union Member States. Commission Services in charge of dealing with Human Rights and Democracy activities funded by Chapter B7-7 of the European Union Budget, have to consult or inform this Committee about the most important decisions they are entitled to take relating to this domain.

The main roles of the Committee are to be consulted on the annual version of the Human Rights and Democracy Multi-annual Programming Document elaborated under the responsibility of the Directorate-General External Relations; to approve Human Rights and Democracy projects identified by EuropeAid Co-operation Office for which the financial contribution is more than one million euro, (the Committee is simply informed when the amount is less than one million euro); to exchange views with Commission services about any geographical or thematic issues that have an impact on Human Rights and Democracy projects and programmes; to consider evaluations of the activities financed from Chapter B7-7

of the European Union Budget. Details of all projects currently overseen by the Committee are available on the website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/ddh_en.htm.

The Committee has met six times in the last 12 months. The UK is represented by officials from DFID and the FCO, as well as from the UK Permanent Representation to the EU. Travel costs for DFID officials to attend meetings of the Committee are met by the European Commission. Other costs incurred for attending this Committee totalled £424.00 (four hundred and twenty-four pounds) in the past twelve months.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

"simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

EU Aid

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her Department is taking to increase EU aid to poor people in the poorest countries. [59642]

Clare Short: We published a revised strategy for improving the poor performance of the European Community development programme in August 2001, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. We welcome the positive steps that have recently been taken, including establishment for the first time of an EC Development Policy with poverty reduction as the central objective. The Commission are also delegating significant new responsibilities to their offices overseas in order to improve communication with developing country partners and cut delays. The Government is working with other member states, the Commission and the European Parliament to try to ensure that these measures begin to have an impact on the ground and allow the European Community to make a much more significant contribution to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We are also working to try to reach agreement that a much greater share of EC aid should be allocated to low income countries where it will have the greatest impact on poverty reduction. In 2000, only 38 per cent. of EC aid was spent in low-income countries compared to 70 per cent. in 1990.

Our objective is to reverse this decline in order to secure radical improvement in the effectiveness of EC aid. Not all member states, Commissioners or MEPs support this objective.

The Government will continue to push for allocations based on developmental needs to countries committed to reducing poverty through all the channels available to us including the 2003 budget negotiations and the revision of the Asia and Latin America Regulation.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many letters were received by each Minister in her Department in each month since June 1997. [59310]

Clare Short: The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by departments. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

Information on Correspondence received from members of the public is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost

Bali Summit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff from her Department will travel to Bali to participate in the mini-summit for discussion of environmental issues. [57652]

Clare Short: Three officials from my department will be attending the Fourth Preparatory Committee meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). In addition, two DFID officials who specialise in water and private sector issues will be accompanying the delegation in the first week to assist in specific meetings.

Sierra Leone

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid the UK has allocated to Sierra Leone in each of the last five years. [59200]

Clare Short: The UK's total development assistance to Sierra Leone over the last five years, including non-DFID debt relief, was as follows:

	£(m)
1996–97	10.8
1997–98	3.3
1998–99	9.2
1999–2000	30.0
2000–01	35.1

Finalised figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many press releases have been issued by her Department in each month of 2002. [59478]

Clare Short: The information requested is given in the table:

	2002
January	5
February	4
March	1
Apr	1
May	2
Total	13

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many press releases were issued by her Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59477]

Clare Short: The information is shown in the table:

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
January		7	8	7	7
February		7	2	2	4
March		15	8	2	6
April		9	11	4	3
May	7	3	4	2	
June	6	3	3		4
July	5	3	6	3	1
August	3	1	9		3
Septemer	7	5	7	3	1
October	9	5	4	2	1
November	7	11	14	3	5
December	3	5	6	1	3
Total	47	74	82	29	38

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on what date her Department received reports and representations from the International Committee of the Red Cross regarding the conditions of fighters held in Shibergan prison in Afghanistan; and what action her Department has taken. [58829]

Clare Short: My Department has not received reports or representations from the International Committee of the Red Cross regarding Shibergan prison in Afghanistan. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is pursuing this issue.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent action the Government have taken to protect women in Afghanistan. [59081]

Clare Short: In Afghanistan women have begun to return to work and girls are going back to school. Two women hold office in the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) and 11 per cent. of seats in the Loya Jirga are guaranteed for women. The UK is working closely with the AIA and the rest of the international community, to ensuring women's full and effective participation in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life throughout Afghanistan. To date this includes an allocation of $1 million to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for a programme to support Afghan women's leadership through awareness raising, capacity building and gender mainstreaming; as well as local level, quick impact recovery projects supporting women. We are also providing support directly to the Ministry for Women.

Occupied Palestinian Territories

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of food shortages in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; and what aid is being provided by the UK Government. [59352]

Clare Short: We have recently provided £500,000 to the World Food Programme, and our contributions to UNRWA's Emergency Appeals—£5 million this year—help meet the food needs of the refugee population. We are closely monitoring the situation and stand ready to do more.

Debt Sustainability

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the impact of changes in commodity prices on debt sustainability and the HIPC Initiative. [58631]

Clare Short: At the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and IMF in Ottawa last November, we raised this concern and asked Bank and Fund staff to revisit the debt sustainability analyses of all commodity dependent low-income countries, including the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). The IMF and World Bank analysis, published last month, shows that, although the situation varies from country to country, the external debt indicators for most HIPC countries have deteriorated, and a result several HIPC countries now face unsustainable debt burdens. Following UK pressure, the World Bank and IMF Boards have agreed to provide additional relief countries in this situation. This was reconfirmed at the Spring Meetings last month.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of HIV/AIDS on debt sustainability in developing countries. [58632]

Clare Short: When assessing developing countries' debt sustainability, in the context of the Heavily indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, the IMF and World

Bank work with governments in the countries themselves to produce detailed forecasts of export growth, GDP growth and new borrowing. These forecasts take account of all the various factors affecting the countries' economic situation, including the impact of HIV/AIDS, and the need for concessional borrowing to finance their poverty reduction strategies.

Kashmir

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with the Governments of *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan regarding developments in Kashmir. [59853]

Clare Short: I have not had any recent discussions with either the Government of India or Pakistan about development in Kashmir.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent advice her Department has issued to British NGOs working in Kashmir. [59854]

Clare Short: My Department does not routinely issue advice on conditions in countries where UK based NGOs are operating. Advice or guidance on such issues is provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Children's Rights

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to assist those countries which have signed up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect children's rights to freedom from violence. [59404]

Clare Short: We seek to reduce the poverty of children by working to address the causes of deprivation in their communities. Support for children's rights to protection from violence, exploitation and abusive labour is central to our work towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. DFID's plans for tackling child poverty and supporting the rights of children are set out in "Breaking the cycle of child poverty", published earlier this month. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

UNGASS Document

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what efforts her Department is making to ensure that the commitments made in the UNGASS, World Fit for Children, outcome document are implemented in the countries her Department works in. [59405]

Clare Short: DFID's plans for tackling child poverty are set out in our publication "Breaking the Cycle of Child Poverty", which was launched at the UN Special Session and is available in the Library of the House. Our policies for the reduction of poverty are set out in our published country strategies. The UN General Assembly Special Session on Children reaffirmed the UN commitment to meeting the Millennium Development Goals, which is the central objective of DFID policy.

UNESCO

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's priorities are for UNESCO, including the UK's share of UNESCO's assessed budget. [58566]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to our Institutional Strategy Paper for UNESCO, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. It is also available on our website, www.dfid.gov.uk.

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59760]

Clare Short: DFID is, in the next three months, due to commence a major refurbishment of our East Kilbride office. The detailed specifications for these works are currently being established, but the contractors have been instructed as they were for the refurbishment of 1 Palace Street, that all timber and veneers are to be sourced from sustainably managed forests, in accordance with the relevant DEFRA guidelines. My Department will also ensure that appropriate checks are carried out to ensure that these requirements are met, as they were in 1 Palace Street, despite false claims to the contrary.

Liberia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many Liberians have fled their country following conflict between the Liberian Government forces and the rebel Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development. [58103]

Clare Short: Since the start of this year, UNHCR estimate that around 24,000 Liberians have sought refuge in neighbouring countries as a result of fighting between the Liberian army and rebel forces. Most of these have entered Sierra Leone (some 14,000), though around 6,000 have gone to Guinea, and 4,000 to Cote d'Ivoire.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has offered to the *(a)* United Nations and *(b)* Cote d'Ivoire to deal with refugees fleeing Liberia. [58102]

Clare Short: Since the start of this year, DFID has contributed £2 million to UN agencies and to the International Committee for the Red Cross for their work with refugees and displaced people in the West Africa. We have provided no support directly to the Government of Cote d'Ivoire.

Malawi

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had on the situtation in Malawi. [59647]

Clare Short: I and my officials are in ongoing discussions with all relevant institutions about the situation in Malawi.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she has reviewed the decision to freeze Britain's £12.5 million of bilateral aid to Malawi. [59648]

Clare Short: DFID has allocated £70 million for Malawi in 2002–03. Of this £25 million is set aside for direct budget support. Budgetary support is currently suspended as the Government of Malawi has failed to carry out a number of agreed economic and financial reform measures crucial to progression in poverty reduction in Malawi. I am currently considering redirecting the first tranche of funds set aside for budgetary support to provide additional fund assistance to Malawi.

Palestinian Authority

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid has been made available to the Palestinian Authority to assist in reconstruction and regeneration. [59643]

Clare Short: World Bank-led teams have recently completed a damage assessment following the IDF incursions in the West Bank during April. The physical infrastructure rebuilding costs amount to $360 million. We have agreed to provide technical support for the reconstruction of Jenin camp. Our on-going programmes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and our enhanced support to the United Nation Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees, help address a wide range of Palestinian development needs.

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much expenditure her Department has incurred in each year since 1997 on employing external consultants to deal with the press or public relations of her Department. [59476]

Clare Short: DFID provided £120,000 in 1998 for work by a public relations consultancy to raise awareness of malaria as part of the Roll Back Malaria initiative led by the World Health Organisation.

HIPC

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid is being provided to HIPC by the UK as a proportion of GDP; and if she will make a statement. [59727]

Clare Short: Bilateral debt relief provided by the UK in 2001 accounted for 0.024 per cent. of Gross National Income (GNI), out of total official development assistance of 0.32 per cent. of GNI. In addition, we provided £23 million in 2001–02 to an international Trust Fund managed by the World Bank which finances relief on multilateral debt.

Somalian Refugees

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how many Somalian refugees are believed to be camped in *(a)* Kenya and *(b)* Ethiopia [58100]

Clare Short: The latest figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees indicate there are (a) 129,800 Somalian refugees in Kenya and (b) 50,906 Somalian refugees in Ethiopia. The Kenya figure does not include approximately 10,000 people who have crossed the border into Kenya at Mandera this month.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 24 September 2002

HOME DEPARTMENT

Written Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54081]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend, Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Cook) on 2 May 2002. For the Home Office, the number of outstanding questions for each month between June 2001 and April 2002 as at 30 April 2002 is shown in the table. The table also shows those that were still outstanding on 12 September 2002.

		Outstanding PQs	
Month	*Total PQs*	*At 30 April 2002*	*At 12 September 2002*
1–30 June 2001	136	0	0
1–31 July 2001	495	0	0
1–30 September 2001	0	0	0
1–31 October 2001	427	4	0
1–30 November 2001	641	9	4
1–31 December 2001	343	13	7
1–31 January 2002	661	42	13
1–28 February 2002	555	53	13
1–31 March 2002	512	106	19
1–30 April 2002	705	421	13

We recognise that our performance in answering Parliamentary Questions needs to be improved and we are working closely with directorates and our business change and Information Technology (IT) partners to improve the situation.

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31783]

Hilary Benn: Secondments are part of the Interchange initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: Voluntary, Education, Health, Public and Private. Interchange provides opportunities for civil servants to learn new skills, widen their experience and develop ideas. It also brings in skills and experiences from other sectors.

The number of Home Office staff seconded out to private and public sector organisations is set out in the table. Information for 2001–02 is not yet available.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Private sector	2	3	11	—
Public sector	*162	*80	*94	—

* The figures given for Home Office staff seconded to the public sector include posts overseas.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33676]

Hilary Benn: To obtain information on the total Information Technology spend for the years requested would involve disproportionate cost. However, the following information on high value Information Technology Information Systems (IT)/(IS) expenditure is available.

1. Total expenditure (at £10 million and only)

Year	*Expenditure*
1997	23,599,999
1998	25,000,000
1999	29,000,000
2000	25,666,666
2001	66,466,666

The significant increase in expenditure in 2001 was due to the letting of the Sirius contract at £25 million and the letting of a contract to Bull for IT hardware and infrastructure support for over £10 million.

2. Contracts let/year (at £10 million and only)

Year	*Contracts let*
1997	0
1998	1
1999	2
2000	1
2001	2

3. How many suppliers have been registered in:

England and Wales	3
Scotland	0
Northern Ireland	0
Foreign Companies	1

4. What are the names of the suppliers registered in England and Wales:

Sirius Consortium (ICL/Global Crossing/PricewaterhouseCoopers

CMG

Bull/Integris (now Steria))

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to his Department. [56464]

Beverley Hughes: All executive and advisory non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have a register of interests.

The following table lists the NDPBs sponsored by the Home Office and in each case indicates what the relevant Code of Practice is and where it is available.

Name of body	*Code of Practice*	*Where available*
Executive NDPBs		
Central Police Training and Development Authority (CENTREX)	Yes. A register of interests is being established which will be open to public scrutiny.	Available on request from Central Police Training and Development Authority, Bramshill, Hook, Hampshire RG27 0JW.
Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)	Yes with a register of interests.	Available for inspection on request at the CRE's London office.
Community Development Foundation	Yes with a register of interests. Policy on disclosing interests also contained in Standing Orders.	Standing Orders available on request from Community Development Foundation.
Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC)	Yes entitled Code of Best Practice and Rules of Conduct.	By appointment at the CCRC's office in Birmingham.
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority	Not applicable—no public appointments.	
Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner	No. The two Public Appointees, (the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner) have been invited to confirm in writing adherence to the Cabinet Office code of practice and terms stating adherence will be written into future appointees' terms of apointment. Preparation for a register of interests in hand.	
Parole Board	Yes with register of interests.	The Code as set out in "The Parole Board for England and Wales—Policy and Procedures" is available on request from the Parole Board. The register may be inspected on request, by writing to the Chief Executive of the Parole Board.
Police Complaints Authority (PCA)	Yes with register of interests.	Available for inspection by appointment at the PCA's offices at 10 Great George Street, London SW1P 2AE.
Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO)	Yes with register of interests. Currently under review.	Code available from PITO committee services. Register of interests published in the annual report (see www.pito.org.uk).
The Natonal Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad	Bodies established on 1 April 2002. Policy on disclosing interests contained in standing orders. Code of practice to be drawn up.	Standing orders available on request from the Service Authorities.
Youth Justice Board (YJB) England and Wales	Yes	Available on request from the YJB.
Advisory NDPBs		
Advisory Board on Restricted Patients (ABRP)	Yes.	Available from ABRP in paper form.
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	No. Preparation in hand.	
Animal Procedures Committee (APC)	Yes with register of interests.	www.apc.gov.uk. Also published in the APC annual report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House.

Name of body	*Code of Practice*	*Where available*
Firearms Consultative Committee (FCC)	No. Declaration of interests is published in Annual Report. Membership of the FCC expired in January 2002 and its future is under review.	
Poisons Board	The membership of the Poisons Board has been recently reconstituted after a lapse of 11 years. A new code of practice will be developed in due course.	
Police Negotiating Board	No. Preparation in hand.	
Prison/Probation Accreditation Panel	Yes. Uses Cabinet Office's model code of practice.	
Race Relations Forum	Membership expired November 2001. The future of the Forum is under review.	
Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act Technical Advisory Body	This body was established in April 2002. The code of practice is in preparation.	
Sentencing Advisory Panel (SAP)	Yes with register of interests.	Copies of Code of Practice are available from the SAP. Members' interests are published in its Annual Report.
Tribunal NDPBs		
Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel	Yes. Uses Cabinet Office's model code of practice.	
Investigatory Powers Tribunal	No	
Misuse of Drugs Advisory Body	No. Currently in abeyance.	
Misuse of Drugs Professional Panel	No. Currently in abeyance.	
Misuse of Drugs Tribunal	No. Currently in abeyance.	
Office of the Surveillance Commissioners	No.	
Police Arbitration Tribunal	No.	
Police Discipline Appeals Tribunal	No.	
Other NDPBs		
Boards of Visitors to Penal Establishments	No. Members abide by the Prison rules, which contain provisions for disqualifying from membership, any person interested in any contract for the supply of goods or services to a prison.	

Immigration

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full time immigration officers will be working at the Port of Felixstowe after 1 July. [69983]

Beverley Hughes: The port of Felixstowe will not close, from an immigration point of view, until a new office at or near Ipswich has been established. The four immigration officers currently employed at Felixstowe have been transferred to Harwich on 14 July 2002. Asylum screening will continue to be carried out at Felixstowe until the new facility at Ipswich is operational. Whilst screening is conducted one immigration officer per day will attend Felixstowe from Harwich.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which immigration office will administer the Port of Felixstowe after 1 July. [69982]

Beverley Hughes: Felixstowe has always been administered from the East Anglia Headquarters at Harwich and this will continue to be the case.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if immigration officers will provide a 24-hour presence at the Port of Felixstowe after 1 July. [69972]

Beverley Hughes: Felixstowe staff did not provide a 24-hour service at the Port. The period from 2100 to 0700 was covered by officers based at Harwich. Staff from Harwich will now provide remote cover for the full 24-hours attending when required.

UK Nationals (Zimbabwe)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many United Kingdom nationals resident in Zimbabwe have returned to the United Kingdom to settle in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [69789]

Beverley Hughes: The requested information is not available.

It is not possible to measure how many United Kingdom nationals resident in Zimbabwe have returned to the United Kingdom to settle. As holders of British passports, United Kingdom nationals are free to enter, and to remain in, the United Kingdom without requiring leave to do so they are not subject to immigration controls.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to improve the service offered by the Public Inquiry Office of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at Croydon. [72009]

Beverley Hughes: The aim is to improve substantially the service to the Public Enquiry Office callers and as far as possible reduce the waiting time and long queues.

The Public Enquiry Office Croydon is currently in the process of recruiting an additional team of 17 staff, increasing its same day service capabilities. There are plans to rebuilt the entrance into Lunar House to provide better access to all of those who need to come to Croydon. It is hoped that building work may commence towards the end of this year. Moreover the Public Enqiry Office has improved its signage and website information so that callers are more informed of the service provided and all of the other options available to them.

Asylum

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason Mr. Mohammed Mahmood of Southend, reference M1051379, has not been notified of the outcome of his asylum application; and if he will make a statement. [72157]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that remedial action following the discovery of the existence of a double file has delayed formal notification of the decision in this case. I will write to the hon. Member to explain the present position.

Foreign Students

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review regulations relating to the employment of foreign students as seasonal workers in agriculture. [73054]

Beverley Hughes: Paragraphs 104–09 of the Immigration Rules (HC395) provide for the entry and employment of foreign students under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS). The recent Home Office White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" signalled, in paragraph 3.25, our intention to review the operation of this scheme. A consultation document was published on 29 May 2002, is available on the Home Office website and has been sent to a wide range of organisations with an interest in the scheme. In addition, officials have held meetings with key stakeholder groups. The consultation ended on 23 August 2002. Any changes to the scheme resulting from the consultation will be announced in due course.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much and what proportion of his 2002–03 Departmental Expenditure Limit had been spent by 31 May; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [61753]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1197W.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Rape

Mr. Gale: To ask the Solicitor-General what proportion of allegations of rape made to the police were brought to trial by the Crown Prosecution Service in each of the last five years. [68798]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* There are no wholly reliable or national figures which touch on the precise statistics that the hon. Member seeks.

Some information about the extent to which reported cases reach trial may be found in the Report on the Joint Inspection into the Investigation and prosecution of cases involving Allegations of rape, published in April 2002 by HMCPSI and HMIC. The Inspection included examination of a sample of 1,741 reported complaints of rape. The offender was charged in 467 of these cases. Therefore, of the 1,741 reports of rape, some 26 per cent. resulted in a charge or summons.

The Inspectorates' analysis does not show how many of those 467 prosecutions proceeded to trial or to guilty plea. However, the Inspectorates' Report also analysed 88 rape cases that did proceed to court. Of these 88, approximately 56 per cent. proceeded to trial (35 defendants were found not guilty after a trial and 14 were convicted after a trial). A further 39 defendants, or approximately 44 per cent. pleaded guilty without the need for a trial, which amounts to a conviction rate (including guilty pleas and those convicted after a trial) of 60.8 per cent.

The 1,741 crime reports were drawn from ten Police Forces, and the 88 rape cases that proceeded to court were drawn from nine of these ten Police Forces. The cases were initially recorded as rape for the period 31 December 2000 or before (each Police Force was asked to provide up to a specified number of cases). In view of the limited nature of the file sample, it would be unwise to extrapolate national statistics from these figures.

I take very seriously the need to ensure that all parts of the criminal justice system adopt best practice when dealing with rape cases. In response to the Thematic Review, the Crown Prosecution Service, Home Office and Court Service have drawn up an Action Plan to improve practice in the investigation and prosecution of offenders, and to ensure better treatment of victims and witnesses. The Plan was published on 22 July.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Solicitor-General what proportion of rape cases brought to trial by the Crown Prosecution Service resulted in the conviction of the accused in each of the last five years. [68799]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 15 July 2002]:* The answer is set out at the table attached. The figures include guilty pleas and convictions after trial. The data for 2001 will not be available until Autumn this year.

Persons[1] tried for rape[2] at the Crown Court and numbers and proportion found guilty

England and Wales, 1996 to 2000

	Persons tried[3]	*Persons found guilty*	*Proportion found guilty*
1996	1,125	575	51%
1997	1,249	615	49%
1998	1,518	674	44%
1999	1,464	654	45%
2000	1,373	593	43%

[1] Principal offence basis.
[2] Rape of a female and rape of a male.
[3] Persons for trial excluding those not tried.
Source:
Home Office.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Committees (Scottish Executive Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on economic outward-processing arrangements for textiles is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70916]

Stephen Timms: There are currently no plans for this Committee to meet. There have been no representatives of the Scottish Executive on this Committee in the past. A Department of Trade and Industry Official has represented the UK.

Somalia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the supply of military equipment to Somalia from the UK. [68820]

Nigel Griffiths: Companies exporting arms and other items controlled for strategic reasons from the UK to Somalia require an export licence from the Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation.

In line with United Nations (UN) sanctions, no exports of military equipment to Somalia are permitted apart from items of humanitarian end-use approved by the UN Sanctions Committee. UNSCR 733 (1992) imposed an arms embargo on Somalia covering "all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Somalia until the Council decides otherwise". UNSCR 1356 (2001) amended the scope of the embargo to allow the export of humanitarian exports and protective clothing approved by the UN Sanctions Committee. UNSCR 1425 (2002) widened the scope of the embargo to prohibit "the direct or indirect supply to Somalia of technical advice, financial and other assistance, and training related to military activities."

All relevant export licence applications for Somalia are rigorously assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria and the UN arms embargo; taking into account the particular circumstances prevailing at the time and other relevant previously announced Government policies.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the overseas trips on departmental business that have been undertaken in each of the last five years by officials in her Department; and what the *(a)* cost, *(b)* purpose and *(c)* result was in each case. [68731]

Ms Hewitt: All overseas travel by officials in the Department is undertaken in accordance with principles set in Chapter 8 of the Civil Service Management Code and the detailed rules and guidance set out in the Department's Guide to officials. The detailed information requested about individual trips is not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the staff of her Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66904]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 5 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 622W.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Job Location

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas broken down by (A) whole-time equivalent jobs and (B) the percentage per individual department, body or organisation.

Mr. McCartney *[pursuant to the Written Answer on 24 July 2002, Official Report, vol. 389, col. 1589–90W]:* The information is in the table.

Number of jobs that come under the remit of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

	Scotland			*(excluding Greater London)*		
	Posts (A)	*WTE (B)*	*Per cent. (C)*	*Posts (A)*	*WTE (B)*	*Per cent. (C)*
Core department	943	889.50	0.59	18,722	17,356.90	11.69
Non-departmental public bodies	936	913.5	0.58	6,293	6,136.85	3.93
Executive agencies	13,947	12,987.22	8.71	88,705	80,627.05	55.41
Independent statutory bodies	0	0	0	239.2	228.58	0.15

	Greater London			Wales		
	Posts (A)	WTE (B)	Per cent. (C)	Posts (A)	WTE (B)	Per cent. (C)
Core department	2,778	2,644.97	1.74	461	425.6	0.29
Non-departmental public bodies	4,409	4,253.24	2.75	1,308	1,286.82	0.82
Executive agencies	14,520	13,570.08	9.07	6,801	6,292.28	4.25
Independent statutory bodies	29	29	0.02	0	0	0

Column (A) is the number of posts
Column (B) is the Whole Time Equivalent posts taking into account staff who work part time
Column (C) is the per cent. of posts in (A) against the total number of posts in the Department.

[Changes made to original answer are in bold]

	Scotland			(excluding Greater London)		
	Posts (A)	WTE (B)	Per cent. (C)	Posts (A)	WTE (B)	Per cent. (C)
Core department	943	889.50	0.64	18,722	17,356.90	12.74
			0.59			**11.69**
Non-departmental public bodies	0	0		56	56.00	
	936	**913.5**	**0.58**	**6,293**	**6,136.85**	**3.93**
Executive agencies	13,808	12,853.22	9.40	88,028	79,997.05	59.91
	13,947	**12,987.22**	**8.71**	**88,705**	**80,627.05**	**55.41**
Independent statutory bodies	139	134.00	0.1	677.0	630.00	0.46
	0	**0**	**0**	**239.2**	**228.58**	**0.15**

	Greater London			Wales		
	Posts (A)	WTE (B)	Per cent. (C)	Posts (A)	WTE (B)	Per cent. (C)
Core department	2,778	2,644.97	1.89	461	425.6	0.32
			1.74			**0.29**
Non-departmental public bodies	0	0		0	0	
	4,409	**4,253.24**	**2.75**	**1,308**	**1,286.82**	**0.82**
Executive agencies	14,376	13,437.28	9.78	6,674	6,174.58	4.55
	14,520	**13,570.08**	**9.07**	**6,801**	**6,292.28**	**4.25**
Independent statutory bodies	144	132.8	0.11	127	117.70	0.1
	29	**29**	**0.02**	**0**	**0**	**0**

Column (A) is the number of posts
Column (B) is the Whole Time Equivalent posts taking into account staff who work part time
Column (C) is the per cent. of posts in (A) against the total number of posts in the Department.

DEFENCE

Iraq

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of the attack by allied aircraft on 19 July in the Qadissiya province of Iraq, how many salvos were fired during the mission, what hostile acts the target area had been responsible for in provoking the attack and how many of the people injured and killed were deemed to be military personnel. [73684]

Mr. Ingram: On the night of 18 July, when the incident in question occurred, coalition aircraft responded to multiple attacks on them by Iraqi air defence weapons, including anti-aircraft artillery and missiles, by releasing precision guided munitions.

Coalition aircraft conduct patrols of the Iraqi no fly zones in support of UN SCR 688 which demanded that Saddam Hussein end the brutal repression of his own people. The pilots conducting these wholly legitimate patrols are regularly shot at by Iraqi air defences. They are authorised to respond in self-defence to efforts to shoot them down. This is the only basis on which weapons have been released over Iraq since Operation Desert Fox in December 1998.

The coalition targets Iraqi air defence facilities that pose a threat to its forces patrolling the no fly zones. Exceptional lengths are taken to ensure civilian casualties are kept to the absolute minimum possible, including the employment of very carefully controlled targeting procedures and precision guided munitions. It is in Saddam's interests to distort the truth in his attempts to convince the world that the coalition is responsible for causing widespread suffering to the Iraqi civilian populace. Saddam would readily persecute these people, as he has done in the past, if we did not patrol the no fly zones. We are not prepared to abandon these people.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Area-based Initiatives

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for each area-based initiative for which his Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71463]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department is responsible for one designated Area Based Initiative; the roll out of Community Legal Services Partnerships (CLSPs). CLSPs are voluntary groupings made up of providers and funders of advice and help services and are not funded by the Lord Chancellor's Department. However, CLSPs are supported by regional staff of the Legal Services Commission. The total cost of these staff has been £3.5 million for each of the two years, 2000–01 and 2001–02. As this support varies according to need between CLSPs it is not possible to answer the question precisely for each local area.

Immigration Appellate Tribunal

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to open additional IATs. [73048]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Currently there are no plans to open new Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT) premises. At present all IAT hearings are conducted from Field House in London. However, there are extensive plans to open new Adjudicator hearing centres as part of the Immigration Appellate Authorities' (IAA) expansion programme. The IAA has been tasked with increasing its capacity from the current 4,500 asylum appeals per month to 6,000 cases per month from November 2002.

Centres are planned for Newport, Stoke-on-Trent, North Shields, Bradford and Manchester, opening between November 2002 and June 2003. In addition to the new locations, the hearing capacities of existing centres in Birmingham and Hatton Cross are being increased. The precise timescales for the expansion programme remain subject to lease and planning considerations.

The capacity of the IAT will also need to increase, but this will not require accommodation outside its London base.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he proposes to open the new IAT in Leicester. [73047]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Currently there are no plans to open new Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT) premises. At present all IAT hearings are conducted from Field House in London.

However, as part of the Immigration Appellate Authorities' (IAA) programme of expansion, a new administrative support centre is to open in Arnhem House in Leicester during November 2002. The IAA has been tasked with increasing its capacity from the current 4,500 asylum appeals per month to 6,000 cases per month from November 2002.

The centre will operate in tandem with the existing Loughborough centre, providing back office functions in support of the expanded network of IAA hearing centres.

Fines (Enforcement)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to improve the enforcement of fines imposed by the courts. [73228]

Yvette Cooper: The Government are committed to improving the enforcement of financial penalties. Following the transfer of lead responsibility of warrant execution from the police to Magistrates' Courts Committees in April 2001, my Department has been taking forward a programme of work aimed at improving enforcement. Magistrates' Courts Committees have also been given nearly £10 million extra from April 2002, ring-fenced for enforcement purposes.

The White Paper, "Justice for All", published in July, heralded new legislative proposals aimed at improving enforcement rates. The proposals could include giving court staff a range of discretionary powers to manage the collection of fines on behalf of the court. While those facing genuine difficulties should have access to support and advice, defaulters who refuse to co-operate with the court would face greater sanctions, including for example increasing the fine if the offender fails to pay on time.

Meetings

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he next plans to meet Mr. Duncan Webster and Mr. David Wilkinson. [73050]

Yvette Cooper: I met Mr. Duncan Webster and Mr. David Wilkinson on 4 September 2002. I have no current plans to meet them again, but I would be happy to do so.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 14 October 2002

PRIVY COUNCIL

Parliamentary Scrutiny

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the President of the Council what proposals he has to improve parliamentary scrutiny of ministerial decisions which are made using the Royal Prerogative. [72954]

Robin Cook: As the Ministerial Code makes clear, Ministers are accountable to Parliament for their decisions and actions, including decisions which are made using the Royal Prerogative. If the hon. Member has any proposals to improve parliamentary scrutiny of ministerial decisions, which are made under the Royal Prerogative, I would be willing to consider them.

The introduction of Westminster Hall and the greater flexibility available to select committees should already have increased the House's ability to scrutinise all aspects of Ministers' work, and will continue to do so in the future.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Report

Mr. Beith: To ask the Solicitor-General what the cost was of publishing her Department's annual report for each of the past five years. [70481]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The cost of publishing the Law Officers' Departments' annual report in each of the last four years was as follows:

	£
1999	4,327
2000	4,485
2001	6,849
2002	7,618

In 1998 the Law Officers' Departments' annual report was published as part of the Lord Chancellor's Annual Report and the cost is not separately available for that year.

In addition, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Serious Fraud Office publish Departmental Annual Reports. The costs are as follows:

Crown Prosecution Service

	£
1998	22,695
1999	22,387
2000	18,600
2001	24,340
2002	34,000

Treasury Solicitor's Department

	£
1997–98	11,647
1998–99	11,746
1999–2000	9,505
2000–01	9,910

Serious Fraud Office

	£
1997–98	44,902
1998–99	22,235
1999–2000	21,140
2000–01	20,833
2001–02	25,093

In addition, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers published a document entitled "The Attorney General's Review of the Year 2001–02". Although not formally an Annual Report, it explained the work of the Law Officers over the last year. Its cost was £9,234.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports sent to the IND in 2001 went missing; and of these, how many have subsequently been found. [64237]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost. However, a measure of the number of passports which could not be returned to their owners is the lost passport letter. Since September last year, strict controls have been in place on the way such letters are used; as a consequence more effective searches have been carried out and the number of letters issued has fallen by around 50 per cent. per month (from an average of 45 per month to about 20). Of those searches completed, less than 1 per cent. of passports cannot be found. Even so further initiatives are in place to improve the handling of passports.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the efficiency of the IND. [64239]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 June 2002]:* We aim to consider 70 per cent. of all new general and settlement cases on initial consideration within three weeks. Due to an exceptionally large increase in the number of immigration cases in the latter part of 2001 the turnaround time increased but has now been reduced to four weeks. We are working to return performance to three weeks very shortly. However, cases which cannot be dealt with at the initial consideration stage are taking up to nine months to consider. We are looking to reduce this timescale as a priority case over the next six months. We have also reviewed our processes to speed up the consideration of cases and are looking at options for utilising additional resources within The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND).

Since the beginning of June, queue management changes in the Public Enquiry Office (PEO) in Croydon have resulted in bringing the public faster into the building when it opens. Plans are underway to open a second entrance into the building and to relocate other callers to another Croydon office in a further effort to improve access.

Immigrant Dispersal

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the policy of dispersing immigrants to Wales from the South-East of England. [63338]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* As at the end of March 2002, 1,020* asylum seekers including dependants were being supported in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation in Wales. In addition 160* asylum seekers including dependants in receipt of subsistence only support are resident in Wales. NASS has appointed a Regional Manager in each of its regions. Regional Managers are responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the support provided to asylum seekers in their region.

* Figures rounded to nearest 10. We cannot say categorically that all dispersals were from the south-east of England.

Visa Applications

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about granting visas to Egyptian students in the past 2 months; and if he will make a statement. [65235]

Beverley Hughes: I have received no such recent representations.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are receiving cash-only support; and if he will make a statement. [72930]

Beverley Hughes: As at the end of March 2002, 30,740* asylum seekers (including dependants) were receiving subsistence only support[1] from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Statistics on the number of asylum seekers supported by NASS are available on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration.1.html.

[1] Subsistence only support changed to cash only support in April 2002.

*Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Figures exclude cases where the asylum seekers support has been ceased.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 June 2002, Ref 62529 on asylum seekers, when he expects to publish the research examining the reception policies of *(a)* Sweden, *(b)* Denmark, *(c)* the Netherlands and *(d)* Germany. [66107]

Beverley Hughes: The research commissioned by the Home Office on the reception policies of Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany will be published by the end of 2002. This date is provisional, subject to the work being completed on schedule by the research contractors and to Research, Development and Statistics (RDS) publication procedures (including peer review).

Retail Crime

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) *Official Report*, column 605W, on retail crime, if he will list for each regional crime reduction director, the amount spent on business crime in 2001–02. [71306]

Mr. Denham: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) on 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 862W.

Motorcyclists

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on motorcyclists of the proposed establishment of law enforcing arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [30826]

Mr. Denham: 'Policing a New Century: a Blueprint for Reform' made no specific reference to motorcyclists. One of its themes, however, was the effective tackling of anti-social behaviour. The anti-social use of motorcycles has been a particular issue and growing concern in some areas, for example where the motorcycles have been raced around estates, across public footpaths or over public parks.

The Police Reform Act was introduced by the Government to take forward the proposals in 'Policing a New Century. Amongst its provisions, the Government have given the police new powers to deal with the anti-social use of motor vehicles, including motorcycles. It is already an offence under the Road Traffic Act 1988 to drive inconsiderately on public roads or off-road without consent. The Act now provides an addition that if a vehicle committing one of these offences is being driven in such a way that it is causing or is likely to cause alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public, a constable in uniform will be empowered to stop and seize it. A constable will be able to enter premises other than a private dwelling to effect the seizure. The owner will be able to retrieve the vehicle on payment of removal and storage charges. Detailed arrangements will be made by regulation and will ensure that the owner is not required to pay when the vehicle was used without his consent.

The new power will enable the police to deal with motorcycle nuisance more effectively by putting an immediate stop to such anti-social behaviour.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and

(ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72251]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister (Mr. Blair) on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1373W.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Waste Disposal

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many waste disposal incinerators in the UK have planning permission but are not yet operating; and where they are sited; [73485]

(2) how many planning applications for waste disposal incinerators are awaiting determination by planning authorities in the United Kingdom; and where they are sited. [73486]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Information about individual planning applications in England is not reported to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The position in other parts of the UK is a matter for the devolved administrations.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Public Services

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the work of the *(a)* Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, *(b)* Social Exclusion Unit and *(c)* Regional Co-ordination Unit will be co-ordinated within his new Department; and what impact this will have on the joined-up delivery of inclusive public services at a regional level. [63100]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Social Exclusion Unit and the Regional Co-Ordination Unit were both previously based in the Cabinet Office. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will also include, among other responsibilities, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. As Minister of State for Social Exclusion, Regional Co-ordination, Neighbourhood Renewal and Minister for Women and Equality, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green will ensure a co-ordinated approach on these policy areas.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many and what proportion of the public service agreements of his Department set out in the document "Public Services for the Future 1998" have been met; and if he will make a statement. [68717]

Mr. Leslie: The relevant 1998 and 2000 PSA targets were transferred to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions following the recent Machinery of Government changes. Therefore, a complete list of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's PSA targets is available in the DTLR Annual Report 2002 published on 10 June. The report provides details of progress against PSA targets including those which have been met.

Empty Properties (London)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the empty residential properties in each London borough in the ownership of his Department and its agencies, giving *(a)* the type of accommodation, *(b)* how long each property has been vacant and *(c)* what the intended future use is of the property. [69493]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister currently owns no empty residential properties in any of the London boroughs.

Housing Regeneration

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much *(a)* public and *(b)* private money has been invested in housing regeneration in each of the last five years. [69379]

Mr. McNulty: As regeneration is not limited to housing projects, details of expenditure cannot be broken down as requested.

Public funding for housing regeneration is provided through a variety of programmes. The Housing Corporation has a target for housing regeneration, which is 65 per cent. of Approved Development Programme (ADP) grant approvals for each year; in 2001–02 86 per cent. of approvals were for regeneration. Housing also plays an integral part in many specific regeneration programmes, such as New Deal for Communities.

Public funding for housing regeneration is also provided through local authority housing capital expenditure. However, this is not broken down to provide details of all regeneration expenditure. The following information is available from Housing Investment Programme returns:

Housing Capital Expenditure

(£ million)

	1997–98 outturn	*1998–99 outturn*	*1999–2000 outturn*	*2000–01 outturn*	*2001–02 planned*
Housing within the Housing Revenue Account	1,563	1,660	1,569	1,815	2,326
Local Authority Social Housing Grant	329	336	329	406	530
Other Support for RSLs	2	22	20	27	24
Other housing in the private sector	468	493	500	529	569

	1997–98 outturn	1998–99 outturn	1999–2000 outturn	2000–01 outturn	2001–02 planned
Of which:					
Private sector renewal grants	310	319	321	293	288
Private sector clearance	22	22	19	30	40
Other (including disabled facilities grant)	136	152	160	206	240
Total Housing Capital Expenditure	2,366	2,511	2,418	2,777	3,448

Private sector funding for housing regeneration is levered in through a number of avenues, including through the private finance initiative (PFI), and through large-scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) of local authority housing. We have no overall figures for the level of private money invested in housing regeneration.

Housing Funding

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes to levels of housing funding for each region there have been between 2001–02 and 2002–03. [70804]

Mr. McNulty: A regional breakdown of the main funding stream for housing provided by central government in these two years are set out below. The figures cover Housing Revenue Account Subsidy (including the Major Repairs Allowance), Housing Investment Programme allocations to local authorities and the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme.

	2001–02 (£ million)	2002–03 (£ million)	Per cent. change
North East	377	368	−2
Yorkshire and the Humber	596	602	+1
East Midlands	355	348	−2
East of England	297	302	+2
London	2,266	2,339	+3
South East	405	431	+6
South West	263	273	+4
West Midlands	591	565	−4
North West	918	867	−5
Total	6,068	6,096	—

Planning

Keith Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many planning matters were being considered by Ministers on 22 July. [73245]

Mr. McNulty: At any one time Ministers have under consideration a large number of planning matters including ones concerning the operation of the system, the development and application of planning policy and decisions on called-in planning cases or recovered appeals. Major national issues on 22 July would have included the planning aspects of the statement to the House on 18 July by the Deputy Prime Minster on "Sustainable Communities, Housing and Planning" and taking forward the proposals for reform of the planning system set out in the policy statement "Sustainable Communities—Delivering through Planning" published the same day. Just over 2,100 cases were under consideration at various stages of the planning process, in the Government Offices, the Planning Inspectorate or directly before the First Secretary of State for decision.

Government Business (Overseas)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many days he has spent on Government business overseas in the past 12 months. [65670]

The Deputy Prime Minister: In the twelve months since 1 July 2001, I have spent 34 working days overseas on Government business, deputising for the Prime Minister in the run-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Social Services

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the average percentage increases in social services budgets in London boroughs; and what were the increases in *(a)* social services SSAs and *(b)* revenue support grants (i) for each local authority and (ii) for London as a whole in each of the last five years. [69151]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The tables below provide the amounts and percentage increases in social services budgets, personal social services standard spending assessment and revenue grants paid by this Department for each local authority in inner and outer London and for London as a whole, for each of the last five years. The percentage increases do not reflect the changes in functions, and are not therefore, on a like for like basis. Budget figures are not available yet for 2002–03.

Personal Social Services Budgets 1997–98 to 2001–02

	1997–98 £ million	Increase Per cent.	1998–99 £ million	Increase Per cent.	1999–2000 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2000–01 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2001–02 £ million	Increase Per cent.
Inner London										
City of London	4.851	6.0	4.925	1.5	5.073	3.0	5.838	15.1	7.595	30.1
Camden	73.450	12.2	79.434	8.1	83.763	5.4	88.859	6.1	93.384	5.1
Greenwich	60.872	3.3	63.217	3.9	72.498	14.7	79.992	10.3	83.700	4.6
Hackney (Provisional for 2001–02)	79.922	1.9	80.163	0.3	95.620	19.3	91.020	−4.8	95.071	4.5
Hammersmith and Fulham	59.446	15.3	62.930	5.9	73.517	16.8	69.830	−5.0	73.512	5.3
Islington	75.122	7.7	72.222	−3.9	74.997	3.8	84.543	12.7	104.069	23.1
Kensington and Chelsea	53.642	11.7	57.416	7.0	62.527	8.9	67.022	7.2	71.915	7.3
Lambeth	97.948	13.4	97.511	−0.4	104.777	7.5	112.703	7.6	121.500	7.8
Lewisham	71.431	14.2	78.520	9.9	88.580	12.8	92.969	5.0	93.204	0.3
Southwark	85.970	2.6	87.675	2.0	92,220	5.2	113,811	23.4	129.375	13.7

Personal Social Services Budgets 1997–98 to 2001–02

	1997–98 £ million	Increase Per cent.	1998–99 £ million	Increase Per cent.	1999–2000 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2000–01 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2001–02 £ million	Increase Per cent.
Tower Hamlets	67.838	12.5	71.932	6.0	75.881	5.5	78.987	4.1	85.668	8.5
Wandsworth	77.126	−1.1	81.078	5.1	82.280	1.5	85.833	4.3	88.099	2.6
Westminster	82.901	15.3	76.472	−7.8	95.784	25.3	100.342	4.8	100.758	0.4
Outer London										
Barking and Dagenham	35.750	6.5	37.582	5.1	50.647	34.8	57.904	14.3	61.147	5.6
Barnet	65.342	14.5	69.971	7.1	75.272	7.6	77.849	3.4	90.492	16.2
Bexley	35.114	11.1	38.864	10.7	43.669	12.4	44.755	2.5	47.420	6.0
Brent	59.597	5.0	60.814	2.0	71.898	18.2	70.758	−1.6	75.660	6.9
Bromley	48.271	7.5	52.372	8.5	61.556	17.5	63.371	2.9	68.108	7.5
Croydon	63.051	8.2	65.925	4.6	77.256	17.2	78.238	1.3	83.164	6.3
Ealing	58.068	6.6	62.179	7.1	66.288	6.6	71.049	7.2	85.027	19.7
Enfield	53.479	3.2	55.528	3.8	56.209	1.2	62.337	10.9	75.504	21.1
Haringey	60.880	4.0	62.521	2.7	64.379	3.0	63.649	−1.1	110.873	74.2
Harrow	43.961	11.9	46.336	5.5	48.776	5.2	49.744	2.0	56.187	13.0
Havering	38.568	3.9	40.021	3.8	42.342	5.8	42.972	1.5	42.156	−1.9
Hillingdon	44.117	4.8	50.319	14.1	62.789	24.8	66.664	6.2	74.366	11.6
Hounslow	45.740	6.1	49.002	7.1	51.548	5.2	56.958	10.5	60.627	6.4
Kingston upon Thames	26.868	5.9	28.428	5.8	31.323	10.2	31.958	2.0	35.136	9.9
Merton	33.803	5.9	33.347	−1.3	37.434	12.3	43.155	15.3	47.931	11.1
Newham	75.075	16.1	80.408	7.1	91.025	13.2	94.894	4.3	102.872	8.4
Redbridge	41.471	8.1	42.535	2.6	49.308	15.9	61.607	24.9	63.597	8.4
Richmond upon Thames	31.747	10.0	32.837	3.4	33.794	2.9	35.418	4.8	35.715	0.8
Sutton	30.791	4.8	32.682	6.1	35.794	9.5	38.022	6.2	42.127	10.8
Waltham Forest	56.877	7.2	58.640	3.1	60.497	3.2	60.367	−0.2	63.068	4.5
Total London Boroughs	1,839.089	8.2	1,913.836	4.1	2,119.321	10.7	2,243.418	5.9	2,469.027	10.1

Personal Social Services Standard Spending Assessment—1998–99 to 2002–03

	1998–99 £ million	Increase Per cent.	1999–2000 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2000–01 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2001–02 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2002–03 £ million	Increase Per cent.
Inner London										
City of London	1,563	0.1	2.141	36.9	2.234	4.4	2.349	5.1	2.719	15.8
Camden	61.751	0.3	62.276	0.9	65.504	5.2	68.067	3.9	70.583	3.7
Greenwich	54.460	2.1	59.829	9.9	62.953	5.2	63.824	1.4	65.076	2.0
Hackney	74.325	−1.8	70.924	−4.6	75.190	6.0	77.171	2.6	79.011	2.4
Hammersmith and Fulham	47.201	0.5	47.450	0.5	49.832	5.0	51.577	3.5	53.158	3.1
Islington	62.989	2.2	63.842	1.4	67.969	6.5	67.954	0.0	69.045	1.6
Kensington and Chelsea	41.484	2.8	42.924	3.5	46.549	8.4	49.290	5.9	52.229	6.0
Lambeth	88.775	2.3	85.677	−3.5	90.876	6.1	92.374	1.6	94.026	1.8
Lewisham	71.877	3.6	72.399	0.7	75.338	4.1	75.867	0.7	76.783	1.2
Southwark	74.806	1.6	81.220	8.6	85.596	5.4	87.510	2.2	89.270	2.0
Tower Hamlets	63.511	7.6	70.136	10.4	73.557	4.9	75.331	2.4	77.100	2.3
Wandsworth	68.153	1.7	70.929	4.1	73.659	3.8	74.746	1.5	75.614	1.2
Westminster	58.871	1.8	63.180	7.3	67.906	7.5	71.692	5.6	75.500	5.3
Outer London										
Barking and Dagenham	33.451	8.3	40.115	19.9	42.391	5.7	44.148	4.1	44.826	1.5
Barnet	56.293	9.0	57.160	1.5	60.378	5.6	63.692	5.5	65.811	3.3
Bexley	30.511	11.3	34.958	14.6	36.583	4.6	38.251	4.6	39.540	3.4
Brent	62.388	8.4	57.980	−7.1	60.324	4.0	61.747	2.4	63.013	2.0
Bromley	42.433	6.8	45.988	8.4	47.478	3.2	49.695	4.7	51.120	2.9
Croydon	55.453	6.7	57.303	3.3	59.888	4.5	61.631	2.9	63.255	2.6
Ealing	62.257	8.7	62.472	0.3	65.415	4.7	68.086	4.1	69.048	1.4
Enfield	47.445	9.6	51.591	8.7	54.113	4.9	56.839	5.0	58.442	2.8
Haringey	60.534	4.0	56.376	−6.9	59.406	5.4	61.138	2.9	61.992	1.4
Harrow	34.686	12.8	35.983	3.7	37.664	4.7	39.300	4.3	40.628	3.4
Havering	31.752	10.5	34.526	8.7	36.336	5.2	38.514	6.0	39.890	3.6
Hillingdon	37.911	7.3	40.156	5.9	42.237	5.2	44.054	4.3	45.505	3.3
Hounslow	40.673	4.3	42.113	3.5	44.080	4.7	45.783	3.9	46.255	1.0
Kingston upon Thames	20.269	5.9	21.483	6.0	22.456	4.5	23.387	4.1	24.163	3.3
Merton	30.422	7.4	33.010	8.5	34.067	3.2	35.052	2.9	35.888	2.4
Newham	65.129	7.2	62.896	−3.4	66.482	5.7	68.797	3.5	70.048	1.8
Redbridge	39.465	12.4	41.741	5.8	43.796	4.9	45.514	3.9	46.622	2.4
Richmond upon Thames	26.442	4.7	27.734	4.9	29.171	5.2	30.779	5.5	31.648	2.8
Sutton	27.193	7.0	29.319	7.8	30.153	2.8	31.174	3.4	32.095	3.0
Waltham Forest	51.887	7.2	54.001	4.1	56.118	3.9	56.900	1.4	57.612	1.3
Total London Boroughs	1,626.361	5.0	1,679.830	3.3	1,765.698	5.1	1,822.230	3.2	1,867.515	2.5

PSS Revenue Grants

	1998–99 £ million	Increase Per cent.	1999–2000 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2000–01 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2001–02 £ million	Increase Per cent.	2002–03 £ million	Increase Per cent.
Inner London										
City of London	0.195	36.7	0.182	−6.4	1.601	778.3	1.558	−2.7	0.462	−70.4
Camden	3.621	−5.4	4.798	32.5	5.438	13.4	8.490	56.1	13.228	55.8
Greenwich	3.046	−0.1	3.821	25.4	4.375	14.5	7.345	67.9	11.817	60.9
Hackney	3.776	−2.2	5.013	32.8	6.023	20.1	9.673	60.6	14.210	46.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	3.170	−1.3	4.005	26.3	4.381	9.4	6.962	58.9	11.478	64.9

PSS Revenue Grants

	1998–99 £ million	*Increase Per cent.*	*1999–2000 £ million*	*Increase Per cent.*	*2000–01 £ million*	*Increase Per cent.*	*2001–02 £ million*	*Increase Per cent.*	*2002–03 £ million*	*Increase Per cent.*
Islington	3.348	1.8	4.469	33.5	5.135	14.9	8.480	65.1	14.127	66.6
Kensington and Chelsea	2.882	−6.9	4.235	47.0	4.146	−2.1	6.130	47.9	9.968	62.6
Lambeth	4.481	−2.0	6.273	40.0	7.465	19.0	12.357	65.5	21.702	75.6
Lewisham	3.849	6.3	5.105	32.6	5.969	16.9	9.558	60.1	14.090	47.4
Southwark	4.186	2.3	5.744	37.2	6.701	16.7	11.103	65.7	17.972	61.9
Tower Hamlets	3.623	10.0	4.897	35.2	5.447	11.2	8.918	63.7	13.216	48.2
Wandsworth	3.972	−1.8	4.902	23.4	5.600	14.2	8.735	56.0	15.989	83.1
Westminster	3.711	−5.2	4.674	26.0	5.387	15.2	8.360	53.3	14.072	70.4
Outer London										
Barking and Dagenham	2.028	7.2	2.316	14.2	2.598	12.2	4.668	79.7	6.953	49.0
Barnet	3.298	9.3	3.774	14.4	4.228	12.0	6.871	62.5	12.549	82.6
Bexley	1.932	9.3	2.196	13.7	2.431	10.7	4.012	65.0	8.317	107.3
Brent	2.919	10.1	4.034	38.2	4.804	19.1	7.642	59.1	11.498	50.5
Bromley	2.459	5.8	2.780	13.1	3.102	11.6	5.578	79.8	11.508	106.3
Croydon	2.971	10.3	3.829	28.9	4.371	14.2	7.199	64.7	15.217	111.4
Ealing	3.233	7.1	4.167	28.9	4.837	16.1	7.898	63.3	13.290	68.3
Enfield	2.684	11.0	3.201	19.3	3.644	13.8	6.404	75.7	12.208	90.6
Haringey	2.889	3.1	4.125	42.8	4.849	17.5	8.078	66.6	14.440	78.8
Harrow	2.090	17.5	2.330	11.5	2.616	12.3	4.161	59.1	6.542	57.2
Havering	1.945	13.2	2.157	10.9	2.396	11.1	4.143	72.9	7.152	72.6
Hillingdon	2.319	6.7	2.702	16.6	3.068	13.5	5.294	72.6	8.086	52.7
Hounslow	2.238	3.7	2.848	27.3	3.238	13.7	5.010	54.7	8.535	70.4
Kingston upon Thames	1.351	12.0	1.633	20.9	1.760	7.8	2.841	61.4	5.630	98.2
Merton	1.996	6.0	2.360	18.2	2.737	16.0	4.209	53.8	6.920	64.4
Newham	3.498	13.3	4.792	37.0	5.599	16.8	9.032	61.3	13.716	51.9
Redbridge	2.286	16.2	2.554	11.7	2.861	12.0	4.716	64.8	7.869	66.9
Richmond upon Thames	1.694	2.5	1.912	12.9	2.082	8.9	3.391	62.9	5.680	67.5
Sutton	1.591	4.0	1.815	14.1	2.055	13.2	3.333	62.2	6.939	108.2
Waltham Forest	2.906	6.1	3.510	20.8	3.974	13.2	6.786	70.8	11.137	64.1
Total London Boroughs	92.185	4.2	117.152	27.1	134.919	15.2	218.836	62.2	366.514	67.5

HOME DEPARTMENT

Female Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the staff of his Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66909]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon Member to the reply given to him by my hon Friend, Member for Paisley South (Mr. Alexander) on 5 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 622W.

Design Champion

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1223W, on the Design Champion, which two projects the departmental Design Champion is sponsoring. [73639]

Beverley Hughes: My noble Friend Lord Filkin (the Departmental Design Champion) is sponsoring the new Home Office in Marsham Street, Westminster, and is considering the selection of a second project. He will make this known when a decision has been made.

Retail Crime

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the correlation between retail crime and street crime; [54570]

(2) if he will make a statement on his assessment of the correlation between retail crime and drug abuse. [54566]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Brighton Pavilion (David Lepper) on 23 August 2002, *Official Report*, column 19W.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in the Partnership Development Fund for crime reduction in the last year. [71218]

Mr. Denham: The Partnership Development Fund aims to build the capacity of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to manage the implementation of local projects and strategies to deliver and sustain crime and disorder reduction in their area. The fund enables Crime Reduction Directors located at Government Offices in the Regions and in the National Assembly for Wales to target resources locally. Allocations have been made to Directors totalling £15.54 million in this current financial year.

Street Crime

Mr. Cameron To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the responsibilities of Ministers in his Department relating to specific initiatives and in particular police areas in respect of street crime. [65218]

Mr. Denham: As Minister of State for crime reduction, policing and community safety and children and young people, I have specific responsibility for the street crime initiative within the Home Office.

I and nine other Ministers from across Government Departments were asked by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister (Mr. Blair) in May to act as "sponsor" Ministers for the 10 police force areas covered by the street crime initiatives. Their role is to work with the

areas' street crime partnerships to ensure that local systems for dealing with street crime victims and offenders are working effectively.

The 10 street crime sponser Ministers are:

The right hon. Baroness Blackstone: Avon & Somerset
The right hon. Lord Falconer: Greater Manchester
Hazel Blears: Lancashire
John Denham: London
Yvette Cooper: Merseyside
Ruth Kelly: Nottinghamshire
Barbara Roche: Thames Valley
The right hon. Lord Rooker: West Midlands
Stephen Twigg: South Yorkshire
Hilary Benn: West Yorkshire.

Crime Reduction

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in the partnership development fund for crime reduction in the last year. [69813]

Mr. Denham: The Partnership Development Fund aims to build the capacity of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to manage the implementation of local projects and strategies to deliver and sustain crime and disorder reduction in their area. The fund enables Crime Reduction Directors located at Government Offices in the Regions and in the National Assembly for Wales to target resources locally. An allocation has been made to Directors totalling £15.54 million in this current financial year.

Equipment Leasing

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the equipment leasing arrangements entered into by his Department in each of the last four years; and what the cost is to public funds in each case. [39084]

Beverley Hughes: The Department does not hold detailed information on expenditure for all equipment leasing arrangements. To provide a full answer would incur disproportionate cost, however, the Department's main leasing arrangements are for the supply of photocopiers and fax machines, the majority of which are provided by Canon and Xerox. I am able to provide these details as follows:

£

Year	*Canon*	*Xerox*	*Total*
2000	1,420,112	15,168	1,435,280
2001	1,932,127	24,765	1,956,892
2002 to date	1,531,517	9,541	1,541,058
Total			4,933,230

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 30 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Vida Obiri Yebdah Burgess. [68196]

Beverley Hughes: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer I provided to him on 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 108W.

Mr Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 5 June from the right hon Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Liaqat Ali. [72147]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 17 July 2002.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East of 17 June about Mr. Faut Altunyurt (Ref A 183001). [71350]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* I wrote on behalf of my right Hon Friend the Home Secretary to the hon Member on 30 September 2002.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Blackpool, South dated 13 December 2001, ref 925/2. [65619]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 1 July 2002]:* I replied to the hon. Member for Blackpool South on 27 September 2002.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Anabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which Scottish newspapers the post of Director-General of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate has been advertised. [68848]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The post of Director General of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate was advertised in the following media:

Sunday Times
The Guardian and Observer
The Voice
New Nation and Asian Times
Caribbean Times
African Times
Eastern Eye.

Odgers Ray and Berndtson, the consultancy service used to administer the campaign, also advertised the post via the Internet.

No newspapers exclusive to Scotland were targeted during this recruitment campaign.

Open Source Software

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is towards using open source software; and what percentage is used in his Department. [69316]

Beverley Hughes: The choice of software to meet the business needs of the Home Office now largely rests with its strategic ISIT suppliers who are contracted, largely under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), to meet business requirements and provide value for money solutions, including the consideration of open source solutions. In the main, the Home Office no longer

chooses specific software. Within our business requirements the Home Office ensure that any technical choices should meet relevant government software standards and provide for interoperability with our public and business partners. The Home Office supports and will respond where appropriate to Office of Government Commerce competition initiatives which encourage the availability of choice in the software marketplace. The Government's policy for Open Source Software was published in July 2002 and is available at the following web address http://www.govtalk.gov.uk

Current suppliers to the Home Office are not known to extensively use, or have plans for implementing, open source software. None of the major non-PFI delivered projects utilise open source software.

Victims of Crimes

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from the public concerning the position of victims of crimes. [66337]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office receives regular correspondence from victims of crime. Home Office Ministers and officials also have regular contact with Victim Support and other organisations representing victims of crime and take victims' views fully into account when developing policy.

Police

Dr. Spink asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police sub-stations were open in each constabulary in each of the last five years; [62365]

(2) how many police stations were open to the public 24 hours per day in each constabulary in each of the last five years. [62367]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon Member to the reply given to the hon Member for Maidenhead (Theresa May) on 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 829W on the number of functioning police stations in police forces in each year since 1997.

Information on how many stations are open 24 hours per day is not collected centrally.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average daily number of mobile traffic units operating radar guns in the Metropolitan Police area has been for the last 12 months for which figures are available. [31022]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Radar guns are a type of hand-held mobile speed detection device for use at the roadside. There are also laser devices used in the same way. The Government does not collect information about the use of such devices. The Metropolitan Police estimate that on any given day there are at least seven mobile hand-held speed detection devices for roadside use taken out in police patrol vehicles across London.

Substance Abuse

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding is available through his Department for *(a)* education on, and *(b)* prevention of, volatile substance abuse. [73372]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Information about the dangers of volatile substance abuse is provided as part of drug education in schools. This is funded by the Department of Health, for whom volatile substance abuse is also a priority. The Department will, however, be issuing £4.5 million in 2002–03 to support the delivery of Young People Substance Misuse Plans. These plans are developed by all Drug Action Teams to outline how services will be expanded so that all young people requiring drugs services receive them. This will incorporate education and prevention of volatile substance misuse.

Sangatte Protocol

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal immigrants have been returned to France since June 1997 under the terms of the Sangatte Protocol. [63189]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 20 June 2002]:* An agreement was signed with France dated 20 April 1995 in relation to the taking back of passengers who are refused admission on arrival in the United Kingdom ("the 1995 Agreement").

That agreement covers, among other things, the arrival of persons through the Channel Tunnel and therefore has the effect of qualifying the Sangatte Protocol. But it also relates to passengers travelling between France and United Kingdom via the Channel ports. The 1995 Agreement provided that, in relation to asylum seekers, it would be superseded by the relevant provisions of the Dublin Convention once that Convention came into force. The Dublin Convention came into force on 1 September 1997. Therefore, from that dates in relation to those claiming asylum, the provisions of the Dublin Convention prevail in so far as that Convention determines which State is responsible for deciding the claim.

Figures for illegal entrants returned to France under the 1995 Agreement from June 1997 are not available, but locally collated management statistics from 2001 onwards indicate that, in 2001, 6,828 passengers who arrived at the port of Dover who did not claim asylum and did not qualify for entry to the United Kingdom, were returned to France under the 1995 Agreement. In the first quarter of 2002 that figure was 2,385.

Commonwealth Games (Policing Costs)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out his timetable for deciding whether further special grants will be paid to Greater Manchester Police in respect of the cost of policing the Commonwealth Games. [41411]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 603W.

Entitlement Identity Card

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the efficacy of computer technology in matching fingerprints. [72119]

Mr. Denham: With the introduction of the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS), all of the fingerprint bureaux of England and Wales now have the ability to access, store and search national databases of both "ten-prints" from arrestees and marks from scenes of crime. The ability to automate the processing of fingerprints is a huge efficiency gain for the Police Service, where previously this was an extremely labour intensive process.

While the main advantage of NAFIS is speed of search, human expertise is still required. At the forefront of fingerprint detection is the multi-disciplined team of photographers, biologists and chemists who are tasked to enhance the retrieval of fingerprint at crime scenes, and the fingerprint Officers who verify matches and make the identification of marks from scenes of crime.

Response times using NAFIS have meant that arresting officers can now definitively identify persons in custody and associate them with any previous criminal history, in under an hour. Scenes of crime mark searching have equally benefited from the introduction of NAFIS and it is possible for fingerprint bureaux to obtain the responses to searches against the entire National database in under an hour.

Trunk Radio Systems

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the possible health implications of the use of the Terrestrial Trunk Radio Systems within the airwave network; and what reports he studied in order to reach conclusions from his assessment. [23182]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 17 December 2001]:* British Telecom operate the Terrestrial Trunk Radio (TETRA) systems that form part of the infrastructure which supports the Airwave network. Network operators in the United Kingdom are obliged by law to ensure that all of their installations are compliant with Health and Safety legislation. This legislation is enacted to ensure that all workers and members of the public are protected, in line with National Radiological Protection Board recommendations. There are no unique features of the TETRA systems used in support of the Airwave network that would require special assessment.

The Home Office takes an active interest in Airwave health and safety issues and is sponsoring a programme of work to address the recommendations of independent scientific experts. These recommendations relate to the mobile radio part of the nextwork, which uses TETRA technology. Details of this work are available on the Home Office website.

Security Industry Authority

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Security Industry Authority will enforce training standards for *(a)* door supervisors, *(b)* wheel clampers and *(c)* other sectors within the security industry. [58172]

Mr. Denham: We expect that training and competency standards for door supervisors and wheel-clampers will be published in April 2003, with those for other sectors following at later dates. Enforcement of those standards will begin with the introduction of personal licensing on a phased basis from late 2003.

Performance Targets

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 49W, on performance targets, if he will list the targets set since May 1997, including the new and revised versions of those targets amended; which have been achieved; what the target date is for each target; and if he will make a statement. [44477]

Beverley Hughes: Tables detailing the target set since May 1997 in the 1998 and 2000 spending reviews (SR) respectively have been placed in the Library.

Public Service Agreement Targets were set in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review and the 2000 Spending Review. These targets, and performance against them, are published every year in the Home Office annual reports and are available routinely on the Home Office website. Progress made in 2001–02 will be reported to Parliament in this year's Annual Report.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Southern Africa (Food Needs)

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department, in liaison with other donors, is doing to address long-term food security needs in Southern Africa; and if she will make a statement. [69474]

Clare Short: DFID has committed £14 million to help agricultural recovery in the coming maize season in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Jointly with other donors, we are providing sector assistance for agriculture in Malawi and Mozambique. We are also supporting work by the Southern Africa Development Community to facilitate analysis and understanding of food security in the region, to improve national capacity for vulnerability assessment, and to reduce contraints to intra-regional trade in food.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the EU Standing Committee on feedingstuffs is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [70572]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that, as from 21 February this year, the Standing Committee for Animal Nutrition, which was responsible

forfeedingstuffs, was replaced by the Animal Nutrition Section of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health in accordance with EC Regulation 178/2002. The United Kingdom is normally represented on the Committee by officials from the Food Standards Agency and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Scottish Executive is kept fully informed and consulted about issues before the Committee, and there is no bar to representatives of the Scottish Executive attending as part of the UK delegation, should the subject matter required this. The Animal Nutrition Section of the Standing Committee is next due to meet on 13 and 14 November 2002.

HEALTH

Mental Health Services

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds in mental healthcare facilities there were in *(a)* St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority, *(b)* Merseyside, *(c)* the North West and *(d)* England in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997, (iii) 1998, (iv) 1999, (v) 2000 and (vi) 2001; and what the projected amounts are for (1) 2002 and (2) 2003. [71283]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally in the form requested. The table shows the number of National Heath Service mental health beds in the north west region and England for 1996–97 to 2000–01.

The NHS Plan published in July 2000 included extra annual investment of over £300 million by 2003–04 to fast-forward the implementation of the mental health national service framework published in September 1999.

Local services are engaged in the implementation of new service models such as early intervention, assertive outreach and crisis resolution, which aim to provide alternatives to in-patient care.

NHS Mental Health Beds in England and North West Region 1996–97 to 2000–01

Year	*England*	*North West*
1996–97	37,640	5,171
1997–98	36,601	5,030
1998–99	35,692	4,748
1999–2000	34,173	4,636
2000–2001	34,214	4,499

The table below shows the number of mental health nursing beds in private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics intended for people with mental health problems from 1998 to 2001.

At 31 March *Rounded numbers*

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
St Helens & Knowsley HA	210	210	210	210
Merseyside	1,580	1,640	1,480	1,580
North West	5,130	5,340	5,560	5,000
England	26,770	29,000	28,650	28,780

Source:
Department of Health's annual returns

Information for 1996 and 1997 is not readily available. Projections for 2002 and 2003 are not available.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisation is responsible for the disposal of the remaining NHS mental hospital sites in Epsom. [59090]

Jacqui Smith: NHS Estates, an executive agency of the Department is the accountable body for disposals of land in the Secretary of State for Health's ownership, which has been declared surplus to National Health Service requirements.

The agency therefore has responsibility for the disposal of the remaining hospital sites in the Epsom Cluster namely, Horton, West Park and St Ebba's.

The sale of Horton hospital is expected to be concluded soon.

West Park and St Ebba's have been marketed as part of the one off sale of the Secretary of State for Health's retained estate as provided for in the NHS Plan. However discussions have been opened with the parents and relatives group regarding the possible re-development of St Ebba's as a village community for mental health reprovision.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* mental health nurses, *(b)* doctors specialising in mental health care there were and what was (i) the estimated shortfall in mental health nurses and (ii) the estimated shortfall in doctors specialising in mental health care in (A) St Helens and Knowsley Health Authority, (B) Merseyside, (C) the North West and (D) England in (1996), (2) 1997, (3) 1998, (4) 1999, (2000) and (6) 2001; and what the projected amounts are for (x) 2002 and (y) 2003. [71284]

Jacqui Smith [*holding answer 23 July 2002*]: The number of nurses working in mental health between 1996 and 2001 is shown in table 1. The estimated need for additional nurses was included in the NHS Plan and manifesto targets for increasing nurse numbers. Both targets have been met ahead of schedule.

The number of doctors working in mental health is shown in table 2. The need for additional consultants in mental health is recognised in the NHS Plan target for 7,500 more consultants by 2004 than there were in 1999. This target has been broken down by strategic health authority (StHA), and indicative requirements for increases by speciality have been included. The indicative increase for consultants working in mental health within Cheshire and Merseyside StHA, which includes St Helens & Knowsley Health Authority, in 2004 will be 23 or 34 per cent.

Table 1

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed in Mental Health[1] within the specified areas as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalent (wte)

	1996		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	wte	headcount	wte	headcount	wte	headcount	wte	headcount	wte	headcount	wte	headcount
England	46,160	50,930	45,180	50,220	43,960	48,880	43,750	48,920	44,200	49,030	45,410	51,320
North West	6,640	7,420	6,420	7,050	6,220	6,850	6,080	6,790	6,170	6,740	5,980	6,510
Merseyside[2]	950	1,010	1,160	1,230	1,150	1,240	1,030	1,100	1,030	1,100	1,040	1,120
St Helens & Knowsley HA	240	260	230	250	230	240	220	230	220	230	230	240

Notes:

[1]Mental Health consists of Community Psychiatry and Learning disabilities and Other Psychiatry and Learning disabilities

[2]Merseyside includes Liverpool HA, Sefton HA, St. Helens and Knowsley HA and Wirrall HA

Due to the new Regional Office boundaries in 1999 the 1996 to 1998 figures are estimated regional splits.

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten

Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts

Figures exclude agency staff

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Table 2

Hospital, medical staff within the psychiatry group specialty, in the North West Region by specified Health Authority as at 30 September numbers and whole time equivalents (wte)

	1996		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	number	wte	number	wte	number	wte	number	wte	number	wte	number	wte
England	6,310	5,210	6,620	5,540	6,900	5,820	7,210	6,070	7,420	6,390	7,440	6,370
of which												
North West Region	760	640	770	650	810	700	830	710	850	740	840	720
of which												
St Helens & Knowsley HA	30	30	30	20	30	30	30	30	30	30	40	30

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to meet with *(a)* the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and *(b)* local patient groups to discuss the specialist mental health physiotherapy team at Oxleas NHS Trust. [70393]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* I have no plans to meet with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists or local patient groups to discuss the specialist mental health physiotherapy team at Oxleas National Health Service Trust.

I understand that Oxleas NHS Trust has had discussions on this matter with Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich Community Health Councils and the trust's user council and has also informed other interested parties including primary care trusts, hon. Members and a range of NHS and other non-statutory providers.

Oxleas NHS Trust has also had several meetings with a representative of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and are arranging a further meeting with the chief executive of the society to discuss this issue further.

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the role of multidisciplinary services for the treatment of mental health patients; [70388]

(2) if he will make a statement on the role of specialist physiotherapy services in the implementation and delivery of the National Health Service Framework on Mental Health. [70390]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The national service framework for mental health emphasises the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach to care and treatment. There is good evidence that regular physical activity reduces the risk of depression and has positive benefits for mental health including reduced anxiety, enhanced mood and self-esteem. This is important for people with severe mental illness who may be at particular risk of physical ill health.

However, decisions about the configuration of services are a local matter, in the context of national guidance, following *Shifting the Balance of Power.* Primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible for commissioning services for their populations and are accountable to their strategic health authority (StHA) for discharging this function effectively.

With regard to more specialised services that, by their very nature, are provided from relatively few providers, PCTs will increasingly have collaborative commissioning arrangements with other PCTs. This will enable them to pool expertise and ensure sufficient dedicated capacity to develop effective health needs assessments, and plan and secure delivery of services.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 468W, on mental health, what impact the work referred to has had on recruitment and retention of staff in mental health services. [68293]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002]*: As yet, it is too early to say what impact this work will make. But, we will examine the effect of these initiatives in order to assess their impact.

This work will build on the major recruitment we have already seen in mental health services. Between September 1997 and September 2001 there has been an increase of 1,670 whole time equivalent (wte) qualified psychiatric nursing staff, 420 wte psychiatrists, 2,030 wte occupational therapists, 1,040 wte clinical psychologists and 150 wte psychotherapists.

Care Homes

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to allow new care homes to be commissioned before a full inspection takes place while there is a backlog of registrations and bed shortages; and if he will make a statement; [72078]

(2) what the average waiting time is between a new care home seeking a registration for the purposes of the care home regulations and an inspection taking place; [72079]

(3) what priority is given to new establishments seeking first registration for the purpose of the care home regulations; and if he will make a statement; [72076]

(4) how many new establishments are awaiting a first registration for the purposes of the care home regulations; and if he will make a statement. [72077]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 24 July 2002]*: The National Care Standards Commission is currently processing three types of registration application; (i) applications made under the previous regulatory authority and transferred to the Commission as a part-processed application; (ii) applications made to the Commission since 1 April 2002; and (iii) applications from existing homes previously exempt from registration. The first two categories of application are treated as a priority.

New care homes cannot operate legally unless and until they have completed the registration process to the satisfaction of the Commission, including the filing of appropriate documentation, reference checking, site visits and interviews to confirm the fitness of the home and its managers. The process can take three to four months and ensures the protection of vulnerable adults and children. A home will be inspected twice per year: once during an announced inspection and once during an unannounced inspection. There is no connection between the time a home completes the registration process and is inspected—this will depend on individual area office inspection programmes.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much correspondence his Department has received from *(a)* care home owners and *(b)* hon. Members with regard to delays in the vetting of care home staff applications by the Criminal Records Bureau. [71042]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 18 July 2002]*: The Department received eight letters concerning delays by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) in processing applications for criminal records checks. Of these one was from a care home provider and seven were from hon. Members.

Measures are being taken to overcome the early operating difficulties experienced by the CRB, which have led to delays in responding to applications for disclosures. We are determined that the CRB will be in a position as soon as possible to meet the high standards of service that it has made clear it will deliver to its customers. The short-term implications for particular service areas using the CRB service are being closely monitored.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those care standards for care homes which take effect in each year from 2002. [68444]

Jacqui Smith: The national minimum standards for care homes apply from 1 April 2002, unless otherwise stated in any standard. Those standards which have not already come into force or will not apply to provision which existed before 1 April 2002 are as follows:

Care homes for older people

20.1: Will not apply to pre-existing provision until 1 April 2007
21.5: Will not apply to pre-existing provision
23.2: Will not apply to pre-existing provision
23.3: Will not apply to pre-existing provision until 1 April 2007
23.4: Will not apply to pre-existing provision until 1 April 2007
23.10: Will not apply to pre-existing provision
23.11: Will not apply to pre-existing provision until 1 April 2007
25.3: Will not apply to pre-existing provision
27.3: Will not fully apply to pre-existing provision before 1 April 2003, following statutory guidance issues by Ministers
28.1: Applies from 2005
31.2: Applies from 2005

Care homes for younger adults (18-65)

24.3: Will not apply to pre-existing provision until 1 April 2007
24.11: Disability Discrimination Act Part 3 requirements do not apply until 1 April 2004
25.3: Will not apply to pre-existing provision until 1 April 2007
25.5.ii: Applies from 1 April 2004
25.6: Will not apply to pre-existing provision
25.8: Will not apply to pre-existing provision
27.2: Applies from 1 April 2004
27.4: Applies from 1 April 2004
32.6: Applies from 2005
32.7: Applies from 1 April 2005
35.5: Does not apply fully until 2004
37.2.ii: Applies from 2005
37.2.iii: Applies from 2005

Care homes for children

24.6: Does not apply fully until 2003
29.4: Applies from January 2004
29.5: Applies from January 2005
34.3: Does not apply fully until January 2005

However, in the light of continuing concern about the possible impact of certain standards, we believe it is right to look again at those physical environment standards which are the most demanding in terms of changes to the fabric of the home.

A consultation document was issued on 16 August. This covers national standards for care home for both older people and younger adults (18-65). The amendments proposed in the consultation document would change a number of standards so that pre-existing care homes will not be expected to meet higher standards than those they already meet or met on 1 April 2002.

The standards proposed for amendment are as follows:

Care homes for older people

1.2: users' guide
20.1/20.4: communal space
21.3: assisted baths
22.2: passenger lifts
22.5: doorways
23.3/23.4: single room floor space
23.11: single rooms

Care homes for younger adults

1.2: users' guide
24.2: living space
24.9: wheelchair access
25.3: single rooms
25.5: shared bedrooms
27.2/27.4: toilets & bathrooms
28.2: shared space

In addition, as part of the consultation, we will accept views on other standards that relate to environmental issues. In line with Government policy all national standards will be reviewed within three years of their introduction.

Care Costs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements his Department has made to ensure that the cost of a state-funded placement does not exceed the total of the NHS registered nurse contribution and social services department personal care and hotel payment; [71201]

(2) how many additional nurses will be required to undertake the registered nursing contribution assessments of state-funded placements in care homes; [71192]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of the changes in fee levels paid by local authority social services departments on the rates paid under each of three bands for nursing contributions. [71198]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* None. Nurses working in the National Health Service will be responsible for carrying out assessments with their local authority partners. It is for all local health and social care economies to plan how they intend to manage this and the ongoing reviews of people's care.

The Department has disseminated some key principles governing the practice of commissioning nursing care in care homes from April 2003. These are on the Department's website at www.doh gov.uk/jointunit and are designed to help smooth the transfer during the introduction of NHS funded nursing care. The Department is continuing to discuss with the provider organisations and with NHS and social services interests the extent to which these might be further refined. Ultimately, this will be a matter for local agreement according to the principles set out in *Building Capacity and Partnership in Care,* published in October 2001. The substantial additional resources that the Government has put in to social services has enabled local authorities to increase the fees that they pay for care in care homes, by as much as 10 per cent in some places.

Local authorities continue to be responsible for the nursing care of residents that they support. From April 2003, funding responsibility for care from a registered nurse will transfer to the NHS.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out for each year how much of the increase in personal social services funding over the spending periods *(a)* 1998 to 2002 and *(b)* 2002 to 2006 is accounted for by an increased allocation for intermediate care. [71194]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The NHS Plan, July 2000, announced that the development of intermediate care services was to be a Government priority, supported by significant additional investment. Details of the additional funding for intermediate care were given in Health Service Circular 2001/001: Local Government Circular (2001) 01, Intermediate Care, published in January 2001.

Decisions on funding for future years, covered by the Spending Review 2002, 2003–04 to 2005–06, are still being taken. Further details will be announced formally at the time of the local government settlement in the autumn.

Councils can decide how much of the additional funds made available for personal social services in recent years through the standard spending assessment and relevant grants such as the promoting independence grant, carers grant and the building care capacity grant are used for intermediate care. When allocating resources to local councils we aim to leave it to councils to choose how best to allocate these resources taking account of local circumstances and priorities.

Since 1997 we have increased the resources available to social services departments by on average 3 per cent. per annum in real terms; and we will be increasing the level of funding by on average 6 per cent. per annum in real terms over the next three years, 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate his Department has made of the proportion of state-funded residents falling into each of the three nursing contribution bands; [71197]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of state-funded care home residents who will be eligible for a registered nurse contribution assessment from 1 April 2003; [71193]

(3) when assessments of state-funded residents for their entitlement to a nursing contribution *(a)* commenced and *(b)* will be completed. [71199]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* At 31 March 2001, there were 71,845 residents of independent nursing homes who were supported by

local authorities. From 1 April 2003, a similar number will be jointly supported with National Health Service funding of their care from a registered nurse.

Currently, those who fund their own care have been assessed and approximately 19 per cent. fell in the low band, 58 per cent. in the medium band and 22 per cent. in the high band of nursing needs. Preliminary information from a small survey of 355 residents conducted earlier this year indicates that the nursing needs of supported residents are not dissimilar to these.

Detailed guidance was issued in September 2001 under cover of HSC 2001 17: LAC(2001)26. NHS nurses should have been involved in the assessments of everyone needing registered nursing care since 1 April 2002, including those who need care from a registered nurse in a care home. All health and social care communities should agree the priorities for ensuring that the remainder of assessments and, if appropriate, determinations, are completed. Primary care trusts should assign individuals provisionally to an appropriate band based on the social services care plan and any records of assessment. Trusts and councils will be aiming to have all assessments completed in time for implementation by April 2003.

Hospital Food

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 682W, on nutrition (1)*(a)* how many and *(b)* which of the six key targets under the Better Hospital Food Programme by (i) region and (ii) health authority will have been fully delivered by the end of (A) December 2001, (B) February 2002 and (C) April 2002; [63043]

(2)*(a)* how many and *(b)* which of the key targets under the Better Hospital Food Programme were fully delivered by the end of (i) March and (ii) June 2002 in each (A) region and (B) health authority. [69022]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* Details of the numbers of hospitals meeting the key targets of the Better Hospital Food initiative by June 2002 are shown in the table. Figures available for periods prior to June 2002 were based on forecast information from National Health Service trusts. No information about the position at the end of March 2002 was collected.

The better hospital food programme, announced in the NHS Plan and launched in May 2001, is a long-term initiative aimed at improving the quality and availability of food in hospitals. It is backed by the provision of an extra £38.5 million.

The NHS Plan made it clear that the variability in the quality of hospital food across the country is not acceptable. The standards set out in the better hospital food programme are designed to reflect changes in preferences and lifestyles over the past few years, provide patients with better access to meals/drinks and ensure that patients get the help they need through the housekeeper programme.

The NHS has made a great deal of progress with the implementation of the better hospital food programme. Where progress has been made with introducing the programme, patients are already noticing and appreciating the difference. The current position means that each day nearly 100,000 patients can access catering services around the clock; some 55,000 now get two new snacks twice a day and some 60,000 enjoy the new dishes designed by leading chefs.

However we are aware of a number of cases where sufficient progress has not been made, and we have set up teams to work directly with these hospitals to ensure that remedial action is taken.

To assist in this £2.1 million has recently been allocated to a number of NHS trusts and primary care trusts to enable them to further develop house-keeper services and to accelerate the progress already made in improving the range and quality of food services available to patients.

Our plans are for further and sustained improvements to the standard and range of hospital food which will in turn mean that clinical benefits of improved nutrition are also realised with consequential benefits for patients and the NHS as a whole.

Acute Hospitals—Better Hospital Food Implementation update June 2002

	All Acute Hospitals (360)		*London Region (54)*		*Midlands Eastern Region (90)*		*Northern (121)*		*Southern (95)*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Ward Kitchen Services	256	71.5	38	70.4	65	72.2	85	70.2	68	71.6
Snack Box Services	210	58.7	32	59.3	44	48.9	71	58.7	63	66.3
Additional Snacks	183	51.1	31	57.4	37	41.1	59	48.8	56	58.9
Main Meal Evening	280	78.2	46	85.2	70	77.8	96	79.3	68	71.6
Leading Chef Dishes	142	40.0	21	38.9	22	24.4	52	43.0	47	49.5

The above table shows the number of hospitals meeting the key targets of the Better Hospital Food initiative by June 2002.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the EU Scientific Committee on medical products and medical devices is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [63637]

Ms Blears: The mandate of the Scientific Committee on Medicinal Products and Medical Devices is to consider scientific and technical questions relating to Community legislation concerning medicines for

human and veterinary use without prejudice to the specific responsibilities of the Committee for Proprietary Medical Products and the Committee on Veterinary Medicinal Products in the context of the evaluation of medicines. The Committee also considers scientific and technical questions relating to Community legislation concerning medical materials and equipment.

The Committee normally meets five times each year. In the last 12 months the Committee met on 1 October 2001, 18 January 2002 and 17 June 2002.

The United Kingdom's representative on the Committee is David Williams, Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor at the Royal Liverpool University Hospital. The European Commission pays the travel expenses for the Committee representatives. The costs to UK public funds are therefore the accommodation costs for the delegate attending meetings. Such costs are not readily available and would incur disproportionate cost to identify.

The Committee considers a wide range of scientific and technical issues relating to medicinal products and medical devices. Subjects raised at the last meeting of the Committee included discussion of an interim report on PVC in medical devices for infants and the effects of Xylitol and other Polyols on Caries development. Agendas for Committee meetings can be accessed on the European Commission's website. A summary of the Committee's discussions is posted to the European Commission's website after each meeting and further details and documents are available from the European Commission on request.

CJD

Mr Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the theoretical risk of human beings contracting new variant CJD as a result of eating sheep and goat meat *(a)* under current regulatory arrangements and *(b)* if intestine were added to the list of specified risk material. [64248]

Ms Blears: I am advised by the Foods Standards Agency, that an agency sponsored risk assesment of the theoretical risk of eating sheep meat indicates that, if BSE were present in sheep, current precautionery measures could reduce the risk by very approximately one third. It is also estimated that the addition of intestines to the current list of specified risk material could double the impact of these measures. In June 2002 the Agency recommended to the European Commission that sheep intestine be added to the list of specified risk material as a precautionary measure against the theoretical risk of BSE in sheep. The issue will be considered by the European Scientific Steering Committee who classify sheep and goats together in terms of the potential risk from BSE.

MMR

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been *(a)* undertaken by his Department and *(b)* carried out by non departmental public bodies responsible to his Department in the past year on potential health hazards of the use of the MMR vaccine. [63935]

Ms Blears: The Department has not undertaken any research itself, but has funded both the public health laboratory service (PHLS) and national institute for biological standards and control (NIBSC) to undertake research studies on safety issues of the combined, measles, mumps and rubella vaccine.

NIBSC recently completed a study to compare the sensitivities of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) methods used in a number of international laboratories. This study was designed to compare the sensitivities of assays used by NIBSC and others in order to validate their abilities to detect measles ribonucleic acid (RNA) in the tissues of children with inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) and autism. This work has recently been submitted for publication.

The Department has also provided further funding to extend this work. The new study will bring together a number of clinical units who are providing tissue samples from patients diagnosed with IBD and autistic spectrum diseases. These samples will be tested for measles RNA at NIBSC and will also be sent to different laboratories to compare the sensitivities of the methods used. The results from this study will be published as soon as they are completed.

With Departmental funding, the PHLS have carried out a study that looked for evidence of associations between MMR vaccination, bowel problems and developmental regression in children with autism. They used a data linkage system, established by PHLS, which links clinical notes with independant computerised vaccination records in the former Thames regions. The results have been published in peer reviewed scientific journals (Taylor B, Miller E *et al* (2002) Measles, mumps and rubella vaccination and bowel problems or developmental regression in children with autism: population study BMJ, 324 393-396). The research group has also looked at a number of other putative adverse events after MMR vaccine using this linkage system: gait disturbance, invasive bacterial infection, aseptic meningitis and purpura.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the MRC will conduct an epidemiological comparison survey one year after the vaccines were administered between (a) children who have had a single antigen vaccine or none at all and (b) with children who have had the MMR vaccine; [66752]

(2) If the MRC will commission a study of children whose parents claim they have been damaged by the MMR vaccine in an attempt to replicate the findings by Dr Wakefield. [66753]

Ms Blears: The Medical Research Council (MRC) does not, as a rule, commission research but welcomes high quality applications for support in any scientific area which will further our understanding of autism and especially those areas which were highlighted in the recent MRC review of autism.

Applications are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health.

All research on MMR is reviewed by the joint committee on vaccination and immunisation, the Government's independent expert committee.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by his Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64636]

Mr. Lammy: Between 1 January 2002 and 23 September 2002, the Department introduced 361 statutory instruments. Eighty-one of these were amending statutory instruments.

Information of the cost and saving of each statutory instrument is not collected centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, regulatory impact assessments, where produced, are available in the Library.

NHS Direct

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Morley and Rothwell constituency have used NHS Direct; and what the constituency average in England is. [66806]

Jacqui Smith: NHS Direct West Yorkshire covers 22 constituencies and has handled 488,000 calls since January 2001. During this period, NHS Direct West Yorkshire handled around four thousand calls from people in the Morley and Rothwell constituency.

Throughout England, people living in 534 constituencies have access to NHS Direct services. Since January 2001, NHS Direct has handled over eight million calls from people living in England. The constituency average in England is around 15,000 calls per constituency.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharges there were in *(a)* Derbyshire and *(b)* England in the last three months. [67434]

Jacqui Smith: Information from Quarter 4 of 2001–02 on the numbers of delayed discharges, at national and regional level shows that there were 38 delayed discharges in Derbysire, and 5,473 delayed discharges in England.

Learning Disabilities

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients with learning disabilities will leave institutional care in the next three years who will require support in the community from London local authorities; and what additional resources have been identified as being required to meet this future demand. [69169]

Jacqui Smith: In the autumn 2001 position statement, all local authorities were asked to identify the number of patients with learning difficulties currently living in long stay National Health Service hospitals, and their forecast numbers up to 2003–04.

In autumn 2001, there were 179 people identified in London councils living in NHS long stay hospitals. Forecasts show that 40 would leave institutional care in 2001–02, 45 in 2002–03 and 93 in 2003–04.

Health authorities have been funded to care for the people with learning disabilities currently living in the old long stay hospitals. They are expected to work with local authorities in planning the transfer of residents and resources to support them to the community by a mutually agreed date. They should agree with the receiving local authority the care to be provided and any financial arrangements so that current and future responsibility for providing and meeting or contributing to the cost of that care is clear.

One of the five priorities for the use of the revenue element of the learning disability development fund is completing the reprovision of the remaining long-stay hospitals to enable people to move to more appropriate accommodation by April 2004. Of the £20.589 million available in 2002–03, £5.029 million has been allocated to London authorities. It is for them to decide how much of this they wish to spend on enabling people to move out of the long stay hospitals.

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the projected numbers of individuals with learning disabilities requiring residential or living placements *(a)* for each London borough and *(b)* for London as a whole for the most recent three years for which figures are available. [69167]

Jacqui Smith: Information on projected numbers of people with learning difficulties requiring, or likely to require, residential or other forms of accommodation are not currently collected by the Department.

The Government's strategy for improving services for people with learning disabilities and their families is set out in the white paper *Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disabilities for the 21st Century* (Cm 6086) which was published in March 2001. Key to the implementation of the changes outlined in the white paper are learning disability partnership boards which are now established in each local authority area and which include social services departments.

The partnership boards are currently required to complete a housing strategy by the winter of 2002–03. Advice issued to partnership boards suggests that their planning should include projections of future demand, which should entail assessing current and past demand as part of their future projections.

Disabled People

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent meetings he has had with voluntary organisations that give assistance to disabled people to discuss improving services for the disabled. [68180]

Jacqui Smith: I take the Department's Ministerial lead on disability and I have recently met with:

Leonard Cheshire, a charity provider of services for disabled people, on 4 February

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy on 11 February

The Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG) on 21 March

SENSE, a voluntary organisation working for deafblind people and their families, on 15 April

Additionally, my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State met with EmPOWER on 18 June to discuss their wheelchair initiative and he also spoke at their conference on 22 April.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has met recently with Bert Massie, Chairman of the Disability Rights Commission, on 26 June. He also met with the British Lung Foundation and the British Thoracic Society on 5 March to discuss respiratory disease, which includes severe disabling lung disease.

Nurses

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* foreign nurses have been employed and *(b)* British nurses have refused employment in each health authority in the last year for which figures are available. [69220]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether verbal summaries of the submissions were given to the sub-group on salt of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the Food Standards Agency. [69980]

Ms Blears: Subgroup members received copies of all the submissions. The subgroup secretariat provided a verbal summary, by way of introduction, as each submission came up for discussion by the subgroup.

Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he is taking to ensure public engagement in the recommendations made by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation; [70254]

(2) if he will publish the agendas of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation in advance; [70252]

(3) what plans he has to hold Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation meetings in public; [70255]

(4) if he will list the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation sub-committees and their members; [70253]

(5) what plans he has to reform the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation; and if he will make a statement; [70248]

(6) what discussions he has had with *(a)* Patient groups, *(b)* healthcare professionals, *(c)* public health consultants and *(d)* the pharmaceutical industry on the reform of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation; [70251]

(7) what plans he has for public consultation on the process and composition of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. [70250]

Ms Blears: The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation have recently launched a website (www.doh.gov/jcvi/index.htm) where a list of members, together with their declarations of interest are published.

The Government has no plans to reform the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation but I have asked that the Committee consider publishing the agendas of meetings on the website in advance and also consider having meetings open to the public.

I have just confirmed that a lay member be appointed to the Committee and an announcement about the appointment will be made shortly. The appointment was made in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointments' Guidelines on appointments to public bodies.

Dyslexia

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has undertaken on the causes of (a) ADHD and (b) dyslexia. [70153]

Jacqui Smith: The Department's policy research programme has not commissioned any research on dyslexia and hyperactivity. However the National Health Service research and development programme, under the direction of Sir John Pattison, has commissioned two studies which are now complete; *The effects of dietary supplementation with polyunsaturated fatty acids in attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder* Professor Harry Zietlin), Eastern Regional Office, July 2000, and *Visual, auditory and biochemical function in neuro-developmental disorders: dyslexia, AD/HD and related schizophrenic disorders* (Dr. A Richardson), London Regional Office, December 1999.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department defines dyslexia as (a) a medical and (b) an educational/learning disorder. [70154]

Jacqui Smith: The World Health Organisation ICD-10 classification of mental and behavioural disorders in children and adolescents lists developmental dyslexia under the heading 'specific reading disorder' and is further classified under 'specific disorders of psychological development' and not under 'medical conditions'. We do not regard dyslexia as a medical condition but a specific disorder of psychological development.

Learning difficulties such as dyslexia fall within the scope of the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice*, published by the Department for Education and Skills in November 2001.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Department is taking to treat diagnosed *(a)* children and *(b)* adults with (i) ADHD and (ii) dyslexia. [70152]

Jacqui Smith: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is mainly a condition of childhood which can continue into later life. The assessment and treatment of ADHD is usually undertaken by child psychiatrists often with the help and contribution of other members of multidisciplinary child mental health services. However, it is becoming increasingly common for paediatricians to diagnose and manage ADHD. It is recommended that interventions should be focused on the behaviour of the child; family interactions, classroom problems and learning difficulties should also

be offered. Even children diagnosed as having hyperkinetic disorder, which is the more severe and specific end of the spectrum, where the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has recommended the use of methylphenidate, a treatment programme should not usually rely on medication alone.

Learning difficulties such as dyslexia fall within the scope of the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice*, published by the Department for Education and Skills in November 2001.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed with *(a)* ADHD and *(b)* dyslexia. [70151]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected in the form requested. However a survey of the mental health of children and adolescents in Great Britain by the Office of National Statistics for the Department of Health, published in 2000, found the prevalence of hyperkinetic disorders which includes attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as being 1.5 per cent. of children in England aged 10-15.

It also examined the prevalence of specific learning difficulties in children with a mental disorder and vice versa. The survey defined specific learning difficulty as the failure to achieve academic progress in reading (therefore including dyslexia) and spelling despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and sociocultural opportunity.

Children with a mental disorder were found three times more likely than those with no disorder to have a specific learning difficulty: 12 per cent. compared with 4 per cent. However there was little difference in the proportions of children with specific learning difficulty by type of disorder for example emotional disorder, conduct disorder, ADHD and less common disorders.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Advisory Committee on cancer prevention is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70574]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on Thursday 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, vol. 390, col. 361-62W.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Committee on the action programme on rare diseases in the framework of the action plan for public health is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70595]

Ms Blears: The next meeting of the EU Committee for the Community Action Programme on Rare Diseases is expected to take place in the autumn of 2002. The Department has lead responsibility for representing the United Kingdom at meetings of this Committee. It consults the Devolved Administrations to ensure that points made represent all parts of the United Kingdom, including the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Pharmaceutical Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70601]

Mr. Lammy: The Pharmaceutical Committee usually meets in plenary at least twice a year and is next due to meet on 13 November 2002. An *ad hoc* "Information to Patients" stakeholders meeting took place on 24 September 2002 and a special meeting of the Pharmaceutical Committee was convened for 2 October to discuss the derogation clauses for parallel imports in the future Accession Treaties. The United Kingdom is represented jointly on the European Pharmaceutical Committee by two senior public health officials from the Medicines Control Agency and from the Department. Medicines control, with the exception of responsibility for enforcement of the Medicines Act 1968 and related legislation, has not been devolved. The UK members of the Pharmaceutical Committee represent UK-wide interests on the Committee and work in co-operation with the Scottish Executive and other Devolved Administrations as required.

European Cities Against Drugs

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason no city in Scotland was nominated for membership of European Cities Against Drugs. [70896]

Ms Blears: Neither the United Kingdom Government nor the Scottish Executive is linked to the European cities against drugs movement, and no UK cities have been nominated for membership. The Government believes that there is a place for appropriate harm minimisation measures, in particular to reduce the rising number of drug-related deaths, as part of the overall national drugs strategy. Harm minimisation measures are opposed by the European cities against drugs movement.

Area-based Initiatives

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each area-based initiative for which his Department is responsible the amount originally budgeted for in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, stating in each year what funds budgeted for were not spent and if they were carried forward. [71461]

Ms Blears: The Health Action Zone (HAZ) initiative is the only Department sponsored area based initiative.

In 2000–01 the funding allocated to HAZs amounted to £120 million. Added to this was £30 million carried forward from 1999–02 making a total of £150 million available to the HAZs. This sum was underspent by £3.3 million which was carried forward into 2001-02.

In 2001-02 the funding allocated to HAZs amounted to £61 million. Added to this was £3.3 million carried forward from 2000–01, making a total £64.3 million available to the HAZs. This sum was underspent by £134,000 which was carried forward into 2002–03.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes are taking place in audiology services to support the introduction of digital hearing aids. [71760]

Jacqui Smith: The modernising hearing aid services project is introducing not just digital hearing aids but modern and improved service provision.

In addition to the 20 pilot sites involved in the project an additional 30 new sites are joining the project this financial year. The project management team works with each site to prepare it for the move to a modernised service.

Sites must have the appropriate infrastructure, information technology equipment and trained staff, before they can fit digital hearing aids. Digital hearing aids require different service delivery models because they incorporate information technology based assessment and fitting procedures.

Know-How Campaign

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to extend the Sun Know-How campaign. [71656]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend for Walsall South (Mr. Bruce George) on Tuesday 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, vol. 389, col. 210W.

Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authorities

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the incidence was per 1,000 population of *(a)* under-16 pregnancies, *(b)* 16 to 18 years old pregnancies, *(c)* under 16s having abortions and *(d)* 16 to 18 years olds have abortions in (i) the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority, (ii) Hampshire and (iii) the South East in each year since 1996; and if he will make a statement. [72030]

Ms Blears: Data on teenage pregnancy is usually presented as rates for under 16 year olds and under 18 year olds. These are also the ages to which targets in the Government's teenage pregnancy strategy relate. The data for these age ranges, and for the areas and years requested, are shown in the tables. Figures for 2001 will not be available until February 2003. The data have been provided by the Office for National Statistics.

Under 16 conceptions and abortions: rate per 1,000 women aged 13–15 by area of usual residence[1], 1996–2000

	Conceptions					Abortions				
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2001[2]*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000[2]*
South East GOR	7.2	7.0	6.8	6.7	6.6	3.8	3.5	3.8	3.7	3.8
Hampshire County	5.9	6.2	6.1	5.7	5.3	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.0
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	9.2	8.4	8.3	7.7	7.8	4.8	4.1	4.2	4.5	4.4

Under 18 conceptions and abortions: rate per 1,000 women aged 15–17 by area of usual residence[1], 1996–2000

	Conceptions					Abortions				
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000[2]*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000[2]*
South East GOR	36.5	36.6	37.8	35.8	35.7	16.2	15.9	16.8	16.3	16.9
Hampshire County	33.0	35.2	35.7	33.2	30.7	15.6	15.9	15.0	15.8	14.7
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	49.0	45.8	47.6	45.6	40.8	19.9	18.9	19.1	17.5	18.7

[1] Boundaries as at 1 April 2001.
[2] Figures for 2000 are provisional.
[3] All figures relate to boundaries at 1 April 2001. Based on these boundaries, Hampshire County excludes Isle of Wight Unitary Authority (formed in 1995), Portsmouth Unitary Authority (formed in 1997) and Southampton Unitary Authority (formed in 1997). Hampshire County therefore comprises the following local authorities: Basingstoke and Deane, East Hampshire, Eastleigh, Gosport, Hart, Havant, New Forest, Rushmoor, Test Valley and Winchester.

A comprehensive, cross-Goverment teenage pregnancy strategy was launched by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister in 1999. This sets a target to halve the under 18 conception rate by 2010 and aims to increase the participation of teenage parents in education and training to reduce their long term risk of social exclusion. Early signs of the strategy's impact are encouraging with figures for 2000 showing a 6 per cent. reduction from 1998 in both under 18 and under 16 conception rates.

The reduction in the under 18 conception rate for the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire area exceeds the national figure with a decline from 1998 of 14 per cent.

Teenage Pregnancy

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the advice given by general practitioners to pregnant under-16s; and if he will make a statement. [72239]

Ms Blears: The Government's teenage pregnancy strategy recognises the importance of helping young people resist pressure to have early sex while seeking to ensure that those who are sexually active have easy access to high quality advice on contraception, sexual health and pregnancy. General practitioners (GPs) have a key role to play in providing this advice.

Best Practice Guidance on the Provision of Effective Contraception and Advice Services was issued in 2000, setting out the criteria against which services should be commissioned and provided. All GPs are expected to

work to the principles of the guidance. These are that services should encourage early uptake of pregnancy testing, provide non-judgmental advice, referral to antenatal care when appropriate or, where abortion is the agreed option, quick referral to National Health Service abortion services.

GPs who hold a conscientious objection to abortion should make their views known to the patient and enable them to see another doctor without delay, if that is their wish. However, even a GP who conscentiously objects should still give advice to patients and perform the preparatory steps to arrange an abortion, where the request meets the legal requirements.

The legal framework for young people under 16 to consent to treatment, including abortion, was set out in the House of Lords ruling in 1985 in the case of Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Health Authority and the Department of Health and Social Security.

A young person under 16 can consent treatment without parental involvement providing the health professional is satisfied that they are competent to understand fully the implications of any treatment and to make a choice of the treatment proposed.The health professional must establish that a number of different criteria are met, including that the young person cannot be persuaded to tell their parents, or to allow the doctor to do so; they are very likely to begin or continue having intercourse with or without contraceptive treatment; and that the young person's best interests require the health professional to give contraceptive advice, treatment or both without parental consent.

Second Opinion Appointed Doctors

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish *(a)* the criteria for the appointment of doctors as second opinion appointed doctors under the Mental Health Act 1983 and *(b)* the appointment procedure for these positions. [72134]

Jacqui Smith: In order to be eligible for appointment to the second opinion appointed doctor's panel, doctors must meet the following criteria:

General Medical Council registered
Member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists or equivalent qualification recognised by the Royal College of Psychiatrists
Registered on the Royal College of Psychiatrists Continuing Professional Development Programme
Consultant status in psychiatry for at least five years
Evidence of mental health practice in the last two years
Two good references from practising consultant psychiatrists who have worked with the applicant within the last two years
Availability to work at a minimum of 10 different locations
Currently practising
Age limit-below 65 years

The procedure for appointment is summarised as follows: interested doctors are asked to submit an application, *curriculum vitae* and two references, which are scrutinised by a panel comprising three persons, usually Commissioners, at least one being a consultant psychiatrist.

This panel makes draft proposals on appointments, which are referred to the Commission's executive management team and then the board for consideration and final ratification.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* locations and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72247]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister on Wednesday 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, vol. 389, col. 1373W.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the members are of the National Care Standards Commission; and what recent statements they have made about the quality of services regulated under Part II of the Care Standards Act. [72302]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) became fully operational and took up its regulatory responsibilities on 1 April 2002.

The Chair of the NCSC Board, Ms Anne Parker OBE, was formerly chair of the Carers National Association. In addition, there are a further 14 non-executive board members. These are:

Ms Roslyn Emblin
Mr. Michael Hake
Mr. Bryan Heiser
Baroness Valerie Howarth, OBE
Mr. Simon Kirk
Professor Jim Mansell
Mr. Derek Mead
Mr. Shaukat Moledina
Professor Howard Parker
Ms Susan Sayer, OBE
Ms Lucianne Sawyer
Professor John Spiers
Mr. Glynn Vernon
Mr. Peter Westland, CBE

Further information about the board members, including a register of their interests, is available on the Commission's website.

I am unaware of any specific statements made recently by any board member regarding the quality of services regulated under Part II of the Care Standards Act 2000.

Minimum Wage

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of employees working within the NHS earn *(a)* the development rate national minimum wage for workers aged 18 to 21 inclusive, *(b)* the national minimum wage for workers aged 22 and over, *(c)* between the national minimum wage and £4.50 per hour, *(d)* between £4.50 and

£4.80 per hour, *(e)* between £4.80 and £5 per hour and *(f)* less than £5 per hour; and if he will make a statement. [72653]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

The Government are committed to tackling low pay in the National Health Service—this year extra resources were targeted to give proportionally more pay to the lowest paid NHS staff, giving a new minimum hourly rate in the NHS of £4.47 from April 2002 for staff on national conditions of service.

		Rates at August 2000				*Estimated rates at April 2002*[1]	
		All staff		*Staff on national payscales*		*Staff on national payscales*[2]	
Age group	*Hourly salary*[3]	*Headcount ('000)*	*as % of all staff*	*Headcount ('000)*	*as % of all staff*	*Headcount ('000)*	*as % of all staff*
18 to 21	< =£3.50	*	0	*	0	0	0
22 or over	< =£4.10	12	1	6	1	0	0
22 or over	£4.10 to £4.50	53	6	29	4	3	1
22 or over	£4.50 to £4.80	33	3	17	3	29	5
22 or over	£4.80 to £5.00	29	3	14	2	10	1
22 or over	<£5.00	128	13	66	10	42	7

Notes:
[1] Figures reflect pay awards up to and including April 2002.
[2] Estimates of pay awards for staff on local payscales are not available.
[3] Hourly earnings are, on average, 28 per cent. higher than with allowances and overtime added.
* Indicates greater than zero and less than 500.
Source:
Department of Health's August 2002 Survey of NHS Staff Earnings.

Children's Food

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress the Food Standard Agency has made in drawing up a code of practice on the marketing of foods to and for children. [73412]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency has met with consumers, enforcement authorities, public interest groups and industry on a number of occasions to try to establish consensus on elements of best practice that would facilitate development of guidance on the promotion of foods to children. However, the Agency has decided to carry out some further research before taking the discussions further.

The Agency has already published, in November 2001, the results of an independent study into parents' and children's attitudes to promotional activity. The next step, this autumn, will be to commission an extensive review of research into the effects of promotional activity on the eating behaviour of children. The Agency expects to publish the results of this review next year and will then restart discussions with stakeholders.

Alternative Medicine

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent initiatives he has taken to make wider use of complementary and alternative medicines and treatments and practitioners in the Health Service. [73498]

Ms Blears: The Department is committed to a National Health Service which is run by its front-line professionals. Decisions on provision of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) will therefore be made by local NHS staff, taking into account the needs of patients, the evidence base, and the effectiveness of regulation of those who provide CAM.

We are co-funding a two-year collaborative project led by Westminster University to identify and develop good practice in the clinical governance of CAM within primary care. The project is being carried out in partnership with the Prince of Wales' Foundation for Integrated Health, which is running a parallel project to identify good practice in the use of CAM in a range of primary care trusts.

To help improve the evidence base we have included CAM in our programme to strengthen research capacity, and bids from academic institutions to host research in this field are currently being considered. We also recently issued a call for research proposals on the role of CAM in the care of cancer patients.

Musgrove Park Hospital

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of improvements in service at Musgrove Park hospital, Taunton since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [73270]

Ms Blears: Since 1997, Government initiatives to improve the performance of the National Health Service have resulted in significant developments in the quality of services provided to local people by Taunton & Somerset NHS Trust, which has responsibility for Taunton & Somerset Hospital, Musgrove Park. In 1997, 88 per cent. of inpatients were seen within 10 months, that has since increased to 92 per cent., in 1997–98 the number of patients seen and treated was 63,000 and in 2001–02 that increased to 73,000. There are now no outpatients waiting longer than 26 weeks for a first appointment. We have also recently announced an allocation of £2.3 million to further reduce waiting times. By March 2003 there will be no patients waiting in excess of nine months for inpatient treatment and 13 weeks for an outpatient appointment.

In addition since 1997 new services have been introduced bringing considerable benefits for patients. These include a breast care unit, an admissions unit, a magnetic resonance imaging scanner. Capital investment schemes in 2001–02 include a new cardiac catherisation laboratory, a third ophthalmic theatre, and an orthopaedic theatre and ward.

NHS IT Procurement

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the OJEC advertisements were placed for the south-west regional procurement process for NHS IT. [73122]

Ms Blears: The advertisement for the south-west regional information technology procurement was placed in February 2000.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the south-west regional procurement process for NHS IT was initiated. [73123]

Ms Blears: The formal initiation of the south-west procurement project took place in December 1999.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what independent evaluation has been made of the single procurement process for electronic patient record systems for NHS trusts in the south-west; and if he will make a statement. [73124]

Ms Blears: In early 2002 a review of the south-west project was carried out by a team from the National Health Service information authority. The review used the approach recommended by the Office of Government Commerce in its gateway review process.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trusts in the south-west have signed contracts with a minimum value of £1 million for hospital-wide electronic patient record systems through the south-west regional procurement process for NHS IT; and how many contracts of this minimum value are expected to be signed in the next three months. [73125]

Ms Blears: No trust involved in the south-west regional procurement has yet signed a contract for hospital-wide electronic patients' record systems. It is expected that the two consortia in the regional procurement process will award contracts by March 2003. At this point, over 20 trusts will sign contracts in excess of £1 million.

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of financial savings that have been achieved since the commencement of the single procurement process for NHS IT in the south-west; and what his next estimate is of future savings for the currrent and five financial years. [73128]

Ms Blears: The south-west project estimates that the savings gained through the shared procurement process will be excess of £1 million. At this stage it is too early to estimate the savings in the resulting contracts, but it is anticipated that these savings will be significant.

Genetically Modified DNA

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the research findings published by the Food Standards Agency on the transfer of GM DNA from food to bacteria in the human gut, *(a)* what level of GM DNA was present in the commercial samples fed to participants in the research, *(b)* what proportion of the GM DNA was complete rather than in fragments, *(c)* to what extent the research looked at whether GM DNA passed through the gut and into the blood stream and blood cells, *(d)* what reference was made to the experiment on mice, post 1997, documenting the ability of GM DNA to pass through the gut wall into the bloodstream, the liver and spleen and *(e)* which scientific experts concluded from this research that humans were not at risk. [73190]

Ms Blears: $3x10^{12}$ copies of the transgene were present in the 454g commercial sample fed to the participants. Survival of the genetically modified (GM) deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) was variable. $4.2x10^{7}$ and $2.7x10^{8}$ copies of the full-length fragment was detected in the digesta from two of the seven ileostomy patients. Nevertheless, intact DNA was not shown to be transferred to intestinal tract bacteria. The aim of the research, which has been peer reviewed, was to study the fate of ingested DNA in the gastrointestinal tract. Transfer of GM DNA into the bloodstream did not fall within the scope of the project. Scientists carrying out the work have drawn their own independent conclusions on the results. The broad implications of the studies on gene transfer will be discussed at an open meeting of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes in November.

Biotechnology Research Projects

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what biotechnology research projects in *(a)* agriculture and *(b)* biomedics have been supported by the Department; and what level of public investment has gone into them in each of the last three years. [73240]

Ms Blears: The Department has no responsibility for agriculture. The main Government agency for biotechnology research is the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, and the main Government agency for biomedical research is the Medical Research Council. Both are funded by the Department of Trade and Industry via the Office of Science and Technology, and information about their work can be seen at their websites, which are www.bbsrc.ac.uk and www.mrc.ac.uk respectively.

NHS Plan (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 262W, on the NHS Plan (Newcastle), what requests were received from each source for intermediate care funding in the Northern and Yorkshire Region; how much they were for; which were *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected; and what share of the national allocation was granted to the Northern and Yorkshire Region. [56621]

Jacqui Smith *[holding Answer 15 May 2002]:* The Northern and Yorkshire Region received 27 bids for intermediate care capital funding. The following schemes were successful in the first phase:

Leeds Health Authority
Selby and York Primary Care Trust
Darlington Primary Care Trust
North Durham Health Care National Health Service Trust
Carlisle and District Primary Care Trust
Gateshead Primary Care Trust
Hartlepool Primary Care Trust
Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust
North Tyneside Primary Care Trust
Middlesbrough and Eston Primary Care Trust
Wakefield West Primary Care Trust

The following schemes were unsuccessful in the first phase:

Airedale Primary Care Trust
Bradford City Primary Care Trust
North Bradford Primary Care Trust
Calderdale Primary Care Trust (2 bids)
Eastern Hull Primary Care Trust (2 bids)
Eastern Wakefield Primary Care Trust
Harrogate area
Huddersfield Central Primary Care Trust (2 bids)
Newcastle Integrated Older People Service
Newcastle Social Services
North Tees Primary Care Trust
South Tyneside Primary Care Trust
Scarborough area

I announced the allocation of the first phase of £46 million to 80 projects on 6 March 2002. To date a total of £58 million has been allocated to intermediate care capital to 90 projects. Of the £58 million allocated, the Northern and Yorkshire Region received £7.75 million, which is 13.4 per cent. of the total amount. It may be possible to fund further bids from the Northern and Yorkshire region as part of a further phase of funding yet to be allocated.

Occupational Therapists

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 346W, how many occupational therapists were in post in each health authority at March 2001 per head of population. [56632]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Between 1997 and 2001 the number of occupational therapists employed in the National Health Service increased by 2,390 or 20 per cent. Further increases in the NHS Plan period and beyond will help to improve the ratio of occupational therapists per head of population. Our latest projections, based on numbers expected to come out of training, and trends in retirements, occupational therapists working outside the NHS and other factors remaining broadly the same, suggest that there will be over 21,000 occupational therapists working in the NHS by 2009.

Workforce information is collected annually as at 30 September. The number of occupational therapists per head of population by health authority as at 30 September 2001 is shown in the table.

Qualified scientific, therapeutic & technical staff employed in the occupational therapy area of work per head of population by strategic health authority area as at 30 September 2001

		whole-time equivalents	*per head of population*
England		11,820	0.0002
Q01	Norfolk, Suffolk & Cambridgeshire	530	0.0002
Q02	Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire	250	0.0002
Q03	Essex	400	0.0002
Q04	North West London	430	0.0002
Q05	North Central London	380	0.0003
Q06	North East London	350	0.0002
Q07	South East London	310	0.0002
Q08	South West London	320	0.0002
Q09	Northumberland, Tyne & Wear	330	0.0002
Q10	County Durham & Tees Valley	230	0.0002
Q11	North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	310	0.0002
Q12	West Yorkshire	600	0.0003
Q13	Cumbria & Lancashire	450	0.0002
Q14	Greater Manchester	670	0.0003
Q15	Cheshire & Merseyside	510	0.0002
Q16	Thames Valley	470	0.0002
Q17	Hampshire & Isle of Wight	340	0.0002
Q18	Kent & Medway	320	0.0002
Q19	Surrey & Sussex	660	0.0003
Q20	Avon, Gloucestershire & Wiltshire	580	0.0003
Q21	South West Peninsula	430	0.0003
Q22	Dorset & Somerset	350	0.0003
Q23	South Yorkshire	390	0.0003
Q24	Trent	720	0.0003
Q25	Leicestershire, Northamptonshire & Rutland	350	0.0002
Q26	Shropshire & Staffordshire	340	0.0002
Q27	Birmingham & The Black Country	490	0.0002
Q28	Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire	320	0.0002

Notes:
Staff in post figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Population rates are rounded to one significant figure.
Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Data collected as at 30 September 2001 from NHS organisations has been aggregated to strategic health authority area.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities designated with legislation there are within the responsibility of his Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57105]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* There are no prosecuting authorities nor law enforcement agencies designated by law for which the Secretary of State for Health is responsible.

The Solicitor's Office, Department of Health, prosecutes cases investigated by the directorate of counter fraud services, and its National Health Service equivalent the NHS counter fraud services, the medicines control agency and the medical devices agency. The investigators and prosecutors all derive their powers to act for and on behalf of the Secretary of State who is granted general functions by means of statutory powers.

Consequently the investigators and prosecutors are not separately designated by law because they derive their powers from legislation and functions granted to the Secretary of State.

Mobile Telephone Masts

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect on medical devices of the presence nearby of mobile phone masts. [64153]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 June 2002]:* The Medical Devices Agency have not received any reports of telecommunications masts or base stations (similar to masts but located on building rooftops) causing interference to medical devices. We have undertaken work to assess the possible risk from these installations, the most recent being last March where in collaboration with a National Health Service trust and British Telecom measurements were taken on a proposed rooftop installation for the current cellular network. The results indicated that the field strength had dropped to virtually undetectable levels at distances greater than 25 metres from the antenna and that the risk to medical devices being used in adjacent buildings was negligible.

Previous measurement results obtained in other hospitals are listed in the Device Bulletin DB9702, March 1997.

Community Equipment Service

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress with establishing the community equipment service and its financing. [64293]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 27 June 2002]:* There are many long-established community equipment services in England run by councils and National Health Service trusts. The initiative to integate these services at a local level by 2004 and to increase the number of people benfiting from them by 50 per cent. by the same date is progressing. Additional funding to enable equipment services meet the NHS Plan targets has been made available to the NHS and to social services through their baseline allocations between the years 2001–02 and 2003–04. This work is supported by the national integrating community equipment services team, the members of which work with local itegratration lead officers and who are a source of good practice guidance.

NHS Maternity Units

Mr. Wiltshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list NHS maternity units in descending order of *(a)* the ratio of midwives in post to the total number of births and *(b)* the ratio of the full complement of midwives to the total number of births in 2001. [67458]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* The figures are shown in the table in descending order and they represent for each trust the ratio of midwives in post and complement in September 2000 to deliveries in 2000-01 in that trust. Women who are cared for during pregnancy by midwives from one trust may later give birth in a unit in another trust. Relevant information is only available by trusts rather than units.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): In descending order—midwifery staff to deliveries ratios by NHS Trust as at 30 September 2000

		Establishment midwifery figures: deliveries ratio[1]		*Staff in post midwives: deliveries ratio*	
		Whole-time equivalents	*Headcount*[2]	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Headcount*
England		0.033	0.042	0.032	0.041
RJ8	Cornwall Healthcare NHS Trust	0.352	0.450	0.352	0.450
RJU	Chorley & South Ribble NHS Trust	0.162	0.173	0.162	0.173
RHS	Southampton Community Health Services NHS Trust	0.111	0.148	0.111	0.148
RH7	Severn NHS Trust	0.105	0.140	0.105	0.140
REA	Exeter & District Community Health Services NHS Trust	0.097	0.128	0.097	0.128
RLF	North Lakeland Healthcare NHS Trust	0.097	0.143	0.097	0.143
RDZ	Royal Bournemouth & Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust	0.062	0.073	0.062	0.073
RM3	Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	0.055	0.065	0.053	0.063
RCC	Scarborough & Ne Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	0.054	0.061	0.054	0.061
RVY	Southport & Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust	0.052	0.076	0.052	0.076
RMR	Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	0.051	0.061	0.051	0.061
RQW	The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	0.049	0.060	0.045	0.056
RBL	Wirral Hospital NHS Trust	0.048	0.059	0.046	0.057
RBU	Central Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	0.048	0.058	0.048	0.058
RLW	City Hospital NHS Trust	0.045	0.050	0.044	0.049
RE9	South Tyneside Healthcare NHS Trust	0.045	0.052	0.045	0.052
RMP	Tameside & Glossop Acute Services NHS Trust	0.045	0.056	0.045	0.056
REZ	Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust	0.044	0.051	0.044	0.051
RWJ	Stockport NHS Trust	0.044	0.051	0.044	0.051
RMC	Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust	0.044	0.051	0.044	0.051
RA9	South Devon Healthcare NHS T[illegible]	0.044	0.055	0.043	0.054
RMK	North Manchester Healthcare NHS [illegible]	0.043	0.049	0.039	0.045
RVJ	North Bristol NHS Trust	0.043	0.059	0.042	0.057
RH8	Royal Devon & Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	0.043	0.057	0.043	0.057
RFF	Barnsley District General Hospital NHS Trust	0.043	0.048	0.043	0.048
REM	Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust	0.042	0.053	0.042	0.053
RDL	Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust	0.042	0.052	0.042	0.052
RBZ	Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	0.042	0.052	0.038	0.048
RWD	United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0.041	0.056	0.041	0.055
REU	Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust	0.041	0.048	0.041	0.048
RMB	Blackburn, Hyndburn & Ribble Valley Health Care NHS Trust	0.041	0.049	0.041	0.049

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): In descending order—midwifery staff to deliveries ratios by NHS Trust as at 30 September 2000

		Establishment midwifery figures: deliveries ratio[1]		*Staff in post midwives: deliveries ratio*	
		Whole-time equivalents	*Headcount*[2]	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Headcount*
RM4	Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust	0.041	0.049	0.041	0.049
RR4	Pinderfields & Pontefract Hospitals NHS Trust	0.041	0.051	0.041	0.051
RJD	Mid Staffordshire General Hospitals NHS Trust	0.041	0.048	0.041	0.048
RBA	Taunton & Somerset NHS Trust	0.040	0.046	0.040	0.046
RVR	Epsom & St Helier NHS Trust	0.040	0.055	0.038	0.053
RTD	The Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	0.040	0.048	0.040	0.047
RDM	Hastings & Rother NHS Trust	0.040	0.050	0.039	0.049
RK9	Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust	0.040	0.050	0.040	0.050
RWP	Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0.040	0.051	0.040	0.051
RR2	Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust	0.039	0.059	0.039	0.059
RJN	East Cheshire NHS Trust	0.039	0.053	0.039	0.053
RWH	East & North Hertfordshire NHS Trust	0.039	0.049	0.033	0.043
RA4	East Somerset NHS Trust	0.039	0.051	0.039	0.051
RN7	Dartford & Gravesham NHS Trust	0.039	0.054	0.037	0.052
RE7	West Cumbria Healthcare NHS Trust	0.038	0.052	0.036	0.050
RCF	Airedale NHS Trust	0.038	0.045	0.038	0.045
RCJ	South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0.038	0.045	0.037	0.044
RJE	North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust	0.038	0.047	0.038	0.047
RLU	Birmingham Women's Healthcare NHS Trust	0.038	0.049	0.036	0.047
RCV	Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust	0.038	0.048	0.038	0.048
RBN	St Helens & Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust	0.038	0.045	0.038	0.045
RTG	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0.038	0.044	0.038	0.044
RAG	Doncaster Royal Informary & Montagu Hospital NHS Trust	0.037	0.048	0.037	0.048
RMN	Bury Health Care NHS Trust	0.037	0.046	0.037	0.046
RWF	Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust	0.037	0.050	0.032	0.045
RLQ	Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust	0.037	0.047	0.037	0.047
RJY	Wigan & Leigh Health Services NHS Trust	0.037	0.043	0.037	0.043
RKB	University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust	0.037	0.048	0.034	0.045
RR7	Gateshead Health NHS Trust	0.037	0.045	0.037	0.045
RWA	Hull & East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trusts	0.037	0.046	0.037	0.046
RZ	Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust	0.037	0.048	0.035	0.047
RJR	Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	0.036	0.047	0.036	0.047
RJZ	King's College Hospital NHS Trust	0.036	0.042	0.035	0.040
RR9	North Durham Health Care NHS Trust	0.036	0.043	0.036	0.043
RBK	Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust	0.036	0.044	0.036	0.044
RPR	The Royal West Sussex NHS Trust	0.036	0.041	0.036	0.041
RHU	Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	0.036	0.047	0.036	0.047
RF7	Scunthorpe & Goole Hospitals NHS Trust	0.036	0.041	0.036	0.041
RLN	City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	0.036	0.041	0.036	0.041
RFS	Chesterfield & North Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS Trust	0.036	0.042	0.036	0.042
RR8	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	0.036	0.045	0.035	0.044
RBD	West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust	0.035	0.049	0.035	0.049
RWE	University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust	0.035	0.046	0.035	0.046
RF6	North East Lincolnshire NHS Trust	0.035	0.044	0.035	0.044
RCB	York Health Services NHS Trust	0.035	0.045	0.035	0.045
RNZ	Salisbury Healthcare NHS Trust	0.035	0.048	0.035	0.048
RNE	Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust	0.035	0.041	0.035	0.041
RDE	Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust	0.035	0.042	0.034	0.041
RMF	Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0.035	0.046	0.035	0.046
RKC	Warrington Hospital NHS Trust	0.035	0.044	0.033	0.043
RBT	The Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0.034	0.042	0.034	0.042
RFR	Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust	0.034	0.040	0.034	0.040
RL4	The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust	0.034	0.041	0.034	0.041
RPS	Mid Sussex NHS Trust	0.034	0.042	0.025	0.033
RG3	Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust	0.034	0.038	0.026	0.030
RN1	Winchester & Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	0.033	0.045	0.033	0.045
RLT	George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust	0.033	0.043	0.033	0.042
RAJ	Southend Hospital NHS Trust	0.033	0.038	0.033	0.038
RPA	Medway NHS Trust	0.033	0.040	0.033	0.040
RJF	Burton Hospitals NHS Trust	0.033	0.043	0.033	0.043
RAE	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	0.033	0.039	0.033	0.039
RJC	South Warwickshire General Hospitals NHS Trust	0.033	0.043	0.033	0.043
RPL	Worthing & Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust	0.033	0.049	0.033	0.049
RWG	West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0.033	0.045	0.029	0.042
RJH	Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust	0.033	0.048	0.032	0.047
RVQ	Wiltshire & Swindon Healthcare NHS Trust	0.032	0.043	0.032	0.043

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): In descending order—midwifery staff to deliveries ratios by NHS Trust as at 30 September 2000

		Establishment midwifery figures: deliveries ratio[1]		*Staff in post midwives: deliveries ratio*	
		Whole-time equivalents	*Headcount*[2]	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Headcount*
RGP	James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust	0.032	0.055	0.031	0.054
RTA	South Durham Health Care NHS Trust	0.032	0.040	0.032	0.040
RGQ	Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust	0.032	0.044	0.032	0.044
REF	Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust	0.032	0.043	0.032	0.043
RG7	Havering Hospitals NHS Trust	0.032	0.040	0.030	0.038
RC1	Bedford Hospitals NHS Trust	0.032	0.040	0.032	0.040
RFW	West Middlesex University NHS Trust	0.032	0.037	0.027	0.033
RTF	Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust	0.032	0.039	0.032	0.039
RA5	East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	0.032	0.047	0.031	0.046
RTH	Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust	0.032	0.042	0.031	0.041
RQM	Chelsea & Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust	0.032	0.038	0.032	0.038
RNS	Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	0.031	0.041	0.031	0.041
RJ7	St George's Healthcare NHS Trust	0.031	0.037	0.031	0.037
RGZ	Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust	0.031	0.044	0.029	0.042
RHW	Royal Berkshire & Battle Hospitals NHS Trust	0.031	0.044	0.031	0.044
RM1	Norfolk & Norwich Health Care NHS Trust	0.031	0.041	0.030	0.040
RD3	Poole Hospitals NHS Trust	0.031	0.050	0.031	0.050
RDU	Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust	0.031	0.042	0.031	0.042
RJ1	Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Trust	0.031	0.033	0.027	0.029
RA7	United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust	0.031	0.039	0.031	0.039
REP	Liverpool Womens Hospital NHS Trust	0.031	0.040	0.031	0.040
RK5	The Kings Mill Centre for Health Care Services NHS Trust	0.031	0.036	0.031	0.036
RH6	Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust	0.031	0.035	0.031	0.035
RQQ	Hinchingbrooke Healthcare NHS Trust	0.030	0.042	0.030	0.042
RN5	North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0.030	0.042	0.029	0.041
RHM	Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust	0.030	0.040	0.030	0.040
RC3	Ealing Hospital NHS Trust	0.030	0.044	0.030	0.044
RH2	South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	0.030	0.042	0.028	0.040
RQX	Homerton Hospital NHS Trust	0.030	0.032	0.023	0.024
RC9	Luton & Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	0.030	0.045	0.028	0.043
RCD	Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust	0.030	0.038	0.030	0.038
RMW	Dewsbury Health Care NHS Trust	0.030	0.034	0.030	0.034
RQN	The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	0.030	0.047	0.027	0.044
RGN	Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	0.030	0.036	0.030	0.036
RTX	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	0.030	0.039	0.029	0.039
RKE	Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	0.030	0.044	0.030	0.044
RM2	South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust	0.030	0.034	0.030	0.034
RNH	Newham Healthcare NHS Trust	0.030	0.033	0.026	0.029
RNQ	Kettering General Hospital NHS Trust	0.029	0.038	0.029	0.038
RAP	North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust	0.029	0.034	0.029	0.034
RR1	Birmingham Heartlands & Solihull NHS Trust	0.029	0.035	0.029	0.035
RCP	Bassetlaw Hospital & Community Health Services NHS Trust	0.029	0.036	0.029	0.036
RDD	Basildon & Thurrock General Hospitals NHS Trust	0.028	0.036	0.027	0.035
RD8	Milton Keynes General Hospital NHS Trust	0.028	0.034	0.028	0.034
RN3	Swindon & Marlborough NHS Trust	0.028	0.040	0.027	0.039
RTP	Surrey & Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust	0.028	0.037	0.028	0.037
RLG	Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust	0.028	0.040	0.028	0.040
RV8	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	0.028	0.035	0.028	0.035
RNA	Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust	0.027	0.045	0.026	0.044
RTK	Ashford & St Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust	0.027	0.041	0.027	0.041
RAS	The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	0.027	0.034	0.027	0.034
RAX	Kingston Hospital NHS Trust	0.027	0.037	0.027	0.037
RVL	Barnet & Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	0.027	0.035	0.026	0.035
RCS	Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	0.026	0.034	0.026	0.034
RNT	Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust	0.026	0.033	0.021	0.028
RD7	Heatherwood & Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust	0.025	0.030	0.023	0.028
RJ2	The Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust	0.025	0.029	0.025	0.029
RCX	Kings Lynn & Wisbech Hospitals NHS Trust	0.024	0.032	0.024	0.032
RDF	Forest Healthcare NHS Trust	0.024	0.028	0.024	0.028
RG4	Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust	0.023	0.026	0.021	0.024
RFK	Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital	0.023	0.030	0.023	0.030
RA3	Weston Area Health NHS Trust	0.022	0.026	0.022	0.026
RQ8	Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	0.021	0.028	0.021	0.027
RVW	North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Trust	0.021	0.027	0.021	0.027
RG2	Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust	0.021	0.028	0.012	0.020

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): In descending order—midwifery staff to deliveries ratios by NHS Trust as at 30 September 2000

		Establishment midwifery figures: deliveries ratio[1]		Staff in post midwives: deliveries ratio	
		Whole-time equivalents	Headcount[2]	Whole-time equivalents	Headcount
RJ5	St Mary's Hospital NHS Trust	0.020	0.022	0.018	0.021
RGA	Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	0.018	0.021	0.017	0.021
RRV	University College London Hospitals NHS Trust	0.017	0.018	0.017	0.018
RGT	Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	0.017	0.023	0.017	0.023
RVV	East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust	0.016	0.019	0.016	0.019
REX	Oldham NHS Trust	0.015	0.016	0.015	0.016
RJ6	Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust	0.013	0.022	0.013	0.022
RAL	Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	0.013	0.013	0.013	0.013
RA2	Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust	0.004	0.007	0.004	0.007
RGR	West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	0.004	0.004	0.004	0.004
RCA	Northallerton Health Services NHS Trust	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001

Notes:
[1] Establishment midwife figures are the sum of the staff in posts figures as at 30 September 2000 and the 3 month vacancy figures as at 31 March 2001 so will not necessarily give an accurate reflection of the actual establishment.
[2] Headcount establishment figures are the sum in post headcount and the 3 month vacancies whole-time equivalents, headcount vacancy figures are unavailable.
[3] Deliveries at Royal London (RNJ) are attended by midwives employed by Tower Hamlets (RRG) and have therefore been excluded.
[4] Figures are rounded to three decimal places.
[5] Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
[6] Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census
Department of Health NHS Workforce Vacancy Survey
Office for National Statistics (ONS) Birth Registration Statistics as compiled by SD3G

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list NHS maternity units in descending order of the percentage of Caesarean deliveries in 2001. [67460]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 July 2002]:* The table showing the percentage of deliveries by caesarean section by trust in descending order fo2000 to 2001, taken from the data published in the National Health Service Maternity Statistics, England Bulletin 2002/11 published in April 2002 has been placed in the Library.

NHS Direct

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases have been dealt with by NHS Direct; how many calls have been abandoned; how many call centres are operational, and where they are; what the runnings costs are of each call centre; and if he will make a statement. [72499]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Since its launch in March 1998, NHS Direct has handled 13 million calls. Approximately 7 per cent. of calls made to NHS Direct are abandoned without the caller speaking to a nurse.

There are 22 call centres in operation throughout England. Where they are located and the running costs for each site is outlined in the table.

NHS Direct Site	*Geographical Coverage*	*Population Coverage*	*Running Costs 2002–03*
Anglia	Cambridgeshire, Norfolk & Suffolk	2,200,000	£3,542,000
Avon, Gloucester & Wiltshire	Avon, Gloucester & Wiltshire	2,200,000	£4,465,000
Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire	Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire	1,700,000	£3,580,000
Birmingham, Black Country & Solihull	West Midlands	2,400,000	£4,041,000
East Midlands	Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire	3,500,000	£5,606,000
Essex	Essex, London Borough of Barking & Havering	2,037,000	£3,815,000
Greater Manchester, Cheshire & Wirral	Cheshire	3,900,000	£6,137,000
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	Hampshire & Isle of Wight	1,800,000	£4,384,000
Kent, Surrey & Sussex	Surrey, Kent & Sussex	4,100,000	£5,560,000
Midlandshires	Staffordshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Warwickshire & Worcester	3,000,000	£4,073,000
North and Central London	Barnet, Barking and Havering, Enfield & Haringey, Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster	1,600,000	£3,121,000
North East	Northumberland, Tyne & Wear	2,000,000	£4,693,000
North East London	East London & City, Redbridge & Waltham Forest	1,100,000	£2,370,000
North West Coast	Lancashire, Merseyside & Cumbria	3,000,000	£4,976,000
South East London	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1,500,000	£3,316,000

NHS Direct Site	Geographical Coverage	Population Coverage	Running Costs 2002–03
South West London	Croydon, Kingston & Richmond, Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	1,300,000	£2,620,000
South Yorkshire & Humber	South Yorkshire, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire	1,700,000	£3,150,000
Tees, East & North Yorkshire	East Riding, Cleveland & North Yorkshire	1,900,000	£3,580,000
Thames Valley & Northamptonshire	Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire & Berkshire	2,800,000	£4,028,000
West Country	Cornwall, Devon, Dorset & Somerset	2,700,000	£4,720,000
West London	Hillingdon, Brent and Harrow, Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	1,350,000	£4,196,000
West Yorkshire	Calderdale & Kirklees, Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield & North Yorkshire	2,100,000	£4,949,000

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 255W, what progress has been made in setting up the NHS Direct performance management framework; and if he will make a statement. [72600]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The first version of the NHS direct performance framework was launched in March 2002. The framework is based on the principle of continuous quality improvement and outlines responsibilities and tools for service delivery and the monitoring of performance and improvement at all levels of the organisation—from the individual to the national service. The framework also outlines a set of key performance targets for NHS Direct, areas for the development of clinical indicators and areas for the development of internal management measures.

Sausage Casings

Mr. Liddington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Natural Sausage Casings Association was first consulted by the Food Standards Agency about its proposed ban on the use of sheep intestines in food. [68501]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 July 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency advise me that the Natural Sausage Casings Association (NSCA) was one of around 1,000 interested parties consulted on the report of the core stakeholder group on BSE and sheep, on 23 May this year. This report, which suggested that the Agency should recommend to the European Commission that intestine from all sheep be added to the current list of specified risk material, was made to the Agency's Board who considered it at their meeting on 13 June. The full detailed response of the NCSA and of their representatives, together with a summary of all the other responses to the consultation was made available to the Board.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his written answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 486W, whether the figures for finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of eating disorder for 2000–01 have been adjusted for shortfalls in data; and if he will make a statement. [68296]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 11 July 2002:]* Pursuant to the written answer of 13 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 486W, the figures for finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of eating disorder for 2000–01 have now been adjusted for the shortfalls.

There were 1973 finished consultant episodes in National Health Service hospitals with a primary diagnosis of eating disorder in 2000–01. This figure does not represent all people with an eating disorder, as many do not require admission to hospital.

Nursing Home Personnel (Information Searches)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason *(a)* the DfES, *(b)* his Department and *(c)* other relevant information records are searched in addition to the Criminal Records Bureau's under the care standards regulations for checking nursing home owners and managers. [69408]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Care homes look after some of the most vulnerable people in our society. In the past there have been far too many instances of abuse and neglect in care homes. We believe it is vitally important to ensure that the proprietors and managers of these homes are of good character and able to discharge their responsibilities fully.

The Care Homes Regulations 2001 require a criminal records check through the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) for care home owners, managers and staff. As part of its checks the CRB will automatically check the Protection of Children Act register, and the Protection of Vulnerable Adults register once this becomes operational.

People who are unsuitable to work with children and vulnerable adults will not necessarily have committed a criminal offence. Regulations 7, 9 and 19 of the Care Homes Regulations 2001 require that registered providers, manager and staff must be fit people. It is, therefore, necessary for a range of records to be checked in order to ensure the fitness of care home owners and managers and to ensure that care home residents are properly looked after and that they are protected from abuse or neglect.

NHS Leadership Centre

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the cost has been in severance pay and other related costs arising out of the decision of the former Director of the NHS Leadership Centre to step down from her post in December 2001; [71075]

(2) whether the former Director of the NHS Leadership Centre is working in an executive capacity in *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* his Department. [71076]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The individual concerned was employed by Royal United Hospitals Bath National Health Service Trust. Her secondment to the Department was terminated on 2 May 2002. Her contract of employment with the NHS trust was terminated on the 22 August 2002. She received no severance payment in connection with her decision to stand down from her position as head of the leadership centre nor in connection with the termination of her contract of employment.

Family Doctors

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the amount of general practitioner hours which could be freed up by cutting the amount of paperwork required of family doctors. [71153]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* The Department has worked with the Cabinet Office public sector team to achieve the outcomes contained in the joint reports *Making a difference: reducing general practitioner (GP) paperwork I and II* published in March 2001 and June 2002.

Estimates, based on advice from practising general practitioners (GPs), suggest that if all the outcomes of these two reports are fully implemented the potential annual savings will amount to 10.3 million GP appointments freed, 3.4 additonal hours saved and up to 80,000 additional requests for medical information removed.

Parliamentary Questions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to Question 59418 from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham. [71040]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on Wednesday 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, vol. 389, col. 1423–24W.

Inappropriate Medication

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1037W, on inappropriate medication, how many people died from *(a)* suffering adverse reactions and *(b)* being prescribed inappropriate medication in each (i) health authority and (ii) region in each of the last five years. [71946]

Mr. Lammy [*holding answer 22 July 2002*]: Reports of suspected adverse drug reactions (ADRs) to medicines are collected by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) through the spontaneous reporting scheme, the yellow card scheme. There are approximately 20,000 reports of ADRs reported to the MCA and CSM through the yellow card scheme each year, of which approximately 3 per cent. report a fatal suspected ADR.

There are four regional monitoring centres (RMCs) that act locally on behalf of the CSM to collect reports of ADRs and to stimulate ADR reporting through local initiatives. These are CSM Mersey, CSM Wales, CSM Northern and CSM West Midlands. The table shows the total number of suspected ADR reports and reports with a fatal outcome received via the Yellow Card Scheme from 1997 to 2001. It includes the number of suspected ADR reports and reports with a fatal outcome received in each of the RMCs. A breakdown of ADR data by health authority is not available. Data from the yellow card scheme cannot be used to measure the frequency of an ADR in a particular region or health authority as ADR reporting is associated with an unknown and a variable degree of under reporting.

It is important to note that submission of a suspected ADR report does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug. Many factors have to be taken into account in assessing causal relationships including temporal association, the possible contribution of concomitant medication and the underlying disease.

Separate figures are not available on adverse reactions resulting from patients being prescribed inappropriate medication.

Total number of Adverse Drug Reaction (ADR) Reports and Reports with a Fatal Outcome from 1997 to 2001 Received by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and its Regional Monitoring Centres (RMCs) from the Adverse Drug Reactions On-line Information Tracking (ADROIT) Database

Year	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
*Medicines Control Agency (MCA)**					
Total No. of ADR Reports:	16,628	18,057	18,488	33,129	21,358
Total No. of Reports with a Fatal Outcome:	455	529	560	610	608
Percentage:	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%
CSM Northern					
No. of ADR Reports:	922	920	904	1,286	1,218
No. of Reports with a Fatal Outcome:	17	26	21	23	9
Percentage:	2%	3%	2%	2%	1%
CSM West Midlands					
No. of ADR Reports:	1,236	1,305	1,307	2,654	1,317
No. of Reports with a Fatal Outcome:	25	26	21	26	41
Percentage:	2%	2%	2%	1%	3%
CSM Welsh					
No. of ADR Reports:	848	970	1,015	2,530	1,418
No. of Reports with a Fatal Outcome:	29	27	15	23	16
Percentage:	3%	3%	1%	1%	1%

Total number of Adverse Drug Reaction (ADR) Reports and Reports with a Fatal Outcome from 1997 to 2001 Received by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and its Regional Monitoring Centres (RMCs) from the Adverse Drug Reactions On-line Information Tracking (ADROIT) Database

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
CSM Mersey					
No. of ADR Reports:	733	711	650	1,161	768
No. of Reports with a Fatal Outcome:	12	19	16	11	15
Percentage:	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%

*The total number of ADR reports (and reports with a fatal outcome) received by the Medicines Control Agency includes all ADR reports (and reports with a fatal outcome) received by the regional monitoring centres in addition to other sources.

Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the financial allocation to the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority has been made on the basis of the combined allocation of its two predecessor health authorities in each year since its creation; and what those levels were; [71891]

(2) what progress he has made in working with IW Stakeholders to recognise island factors in the process of financial allocations for local health services. [71892]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The issue of any additional costs associated with being an island was considered by the advisory committee on resources action (ACRA) in September 2002. ACRA concluded that the arguments presented in a local consultancy report on behalf of Isle of Wight health bodies did not constitute a convincing case. It recommended that there should be no adjustment to the Isle of Wight's target under the resource allocation formula. Ministers accepted ACRA's recommendation.

The initial allocations for 2001-02 were made on an aggregated basis of the two former health authorities. The 2002-03 allocation was made on a combined population of the merged authority. These figures are shown in the table.

Isle of Wight HA, Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA and Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA allocations 2001-02 and 2002-03

Health Authority	2001–02	2002–03
Isle of Wight HA	£108,678,000	—
Portsmouth & South East Hants HA	£397,591,000	—
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & South East Hants HA	—	£561,429,000

From 2003-04 the intention is that allocations will be made directly to primary care trusts.

Local Consultations

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information and guidance he issues to strategic health authorities, NHS trusts and primary care trusts about involving the public in Local Consultations on the provision of health care and social services; and what plans he has to develop this. [72192]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Section 11 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 places a duty on National Health Service Trusts, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and Strategic Health Authorities (StHAs) to make arrangements to involve and consult patients and the public in planning of service provision, involvement in the development of proposals for changes and involvement in decisions about changes to the operation of services.

Currently, work is in progress to develop guidance to support NHS organisations deliver this new requirement. The draft guidance is being developed and overseen by a reference group including representatives from: the local government association, the NHS confederation, Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales (ACHCEW), the society of community health councils staff, cancer link, Wolverhampton CVS, NHS leadership centre, directorates of health and social care, NHS Estates, general practitioners, PCTs and StHAs. In addition, many NHS organisations have contributed to the development of the draft document by providing examples of good practice and commenting on a recent draft version—to ensure that the final document enables effective policy development and a range of involvement strategies.

We also intend one of the key initial NHS demonstrators for fulfilling section 11 requirements will be for all NHS organisations to be signed up to, and working within, a geographically relevant local compact. The voluntary and community sector also have a key role to play in working with their local NHS organisations to enable as many people as possible to become involved in local NHS decision making processes to help ensure that patient and the public are at the centre of NHS decision making.

EU Scientific Committee on Veterinary Measures

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the EU Scientific Committee on veterinary measures relating to public health is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [63639]

Ms Blears: The mandate for the Scientific Committee on Veterinary Measures relating to Public Health is to answer scientific and technical questions, posed to it by the European Commission, concerning consumer health and food safety, and relating zoonotic, toxicological, veterinary and notably hygiene measures applicable to the production, processing, and supply of food of animal origin.

The committee has met five times in the last 12 months. It is composed of independent experts, one of whom is British.

The committee is accountable solely to the European Commission, which pays the travel and subsistence costs. There are no additional costs to United Kingdom public funds. The minutes of its meetings and the opinions it produces are posted on the Commission's web site.

Acute Hospitals

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what services are included in the definition of core services with respect to an acute hospital in the NHS. [57295]

Mr. Hutton: There is no national definition of core services with respect to an acute hospital in the National Health Service. Each local service will reach agreement on where services can best be provided, and any substantial variation in services must be the subject of full public consultation.

Non-NHS Hospitals

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the usage of private, non-NHS hospitals by PCTS. [64338]

Mr. Hutton: In October 2001, the Department carried out a survey of the use of the independent sector for acute elective care between April and September 2001 by National Health Service organisations, including primary care trusts. A poor response rate means that the survey results are not reliable. A further survey to obtain information about the second half of 2001–02 is currently in progress.

Mixed Sex Wards

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 624W, on mixed sex wards, what information he collates on the amount of mixed sex accommodation in the NHS; what information has been collated since 1997; and if he will place such information in the Library. [68770]

Mr. Hutton: Since 1997, it has been a requirement for trusts to report annually to health authorities on forecast compliance status of the overall trust as at December 2002. Each trust measures their progress with compliance against the three objectives as stated in my previous answer.

Trusts are free to publicise their position.

East Lancashire NHS Trust

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the decision on whether to establish a new NHS trust in East Lancashire following the consultation on hospital trusts merger. [69159]

Jacqui Smith: The proposal to establish the new trust in East Lancashire was approved on 29 July. The new organisation will be known as the East Lancashire Hospitals National Health Service Trust and will assume formal responsibility for services currently provided by the NHS trusts in Blackburn and Burnley with effect from 1 April 2003.

Local hon. Members were informed of this decision and I also wrote to my hon. Friend on 7 September following his letter to me dated 1 July on the same subject.

Vaccination Programme

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Government have spent on the vaccination programme in each year since 1972. [69236]

Ms Blears: The information is not collected in the format requested. To provide a detailed response would incur disproportionate costs.

NHS Executive

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the NHS Executive at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [69702]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS Executive as a separate part of the Department did not exist at 1 April 2002.

We cannot give a proportion of these staff who have clinical contact with National Health Service patients as we do not collect this data.

Weston General Hospital

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department will reach a decision about whether to build an extension at Weston General Hospital for accident and emergency cases. [71222]

Ms Blears: No bid has been submitted by the Weston Area Health Service Trust for an extension to Weston General Hospital for accident and emergency cases. The trust did submit a bid for a diagnostic and treatment centre to be developed in the existing newly built extension at the hospital at a cost of £2.1 million. On 15 August we announced investment of £39 million for ten more diagnostic and treatment centres in the next two years which will in total treat over 25,000 extra cases a year, the Weston Area Health NHS Trust was one of these.

Neonatal Services

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, when he expects to publish the report on Neonatal Services; and if he will answer the written questions from the hon. Member for Castle Point, refs: 67662, 67671, 67672, 67668, 67675, 67663, 67664, 67673, 67674, 67669, 67670 and 67661. [71245]

Jacqui Smith: A review has been undertaken of provision for neonatal services which addresses the issues raised by the hon. Member. I am considering the report following from this review and expect to determine the next steps in this process shortly.

The hon. Member's written questions were replied to on Monday 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, vol. 389, col. 120W.

Newborn Babies

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is introducing to improve intensive care facilities for Newborn Babies. [71765]

Jacqui Smith: A review has been undertaken of provision for neonatal services which addresses the issues raised by the hon. Member. I am considering the report following from this review and expect to determine the next steps in this process shortly.

Cancer Treatment

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 18 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 229W, on cancer, what the average time has been over the last three years that cancer patients have waited from an urgent referral to the start of the treatment; and if he will make a statement. [70386]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The information requested is not available. We are putting in place monitoring arrangements to track the percentage of patients waiting less than two months from urgent general practitioner (GP) referral to treatment for all cancers by 2005. Date is currently available on the percentage of patients waiting.

Less than two weeks from urgent GP referral for suspected cancer to first outpatient appointment, 93.8 per cent of patients were within two weeks in 2001, and 95.3 per cent so far in 2002.

Less than one month from urgent GP referral to first treatment for children's and testicular cancers and acute leukaemia, 99 per cent patients with acute leukaemia, 93.5 per cent with testicular cancer and 100 per cent of children with cancer were treated with the target time so far in 2002.

Less than one month from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer 94.4 per cent of patients were treated within the target time so far in 2002.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 152W, on the NHS Cancer Plan, if he will list the members of the working group; if he will publish the recommendations of the group; and what the evidential basis was for the group's recommendations. [67772]

Ms Blears: The membership was:

Dr. Graham Winyard—NHS Executive: Medical Director Chairman

Dr. Val Chisty—Assistant Director of Public Health: West Midlands Regional Office, Department of Health

Dr. Ruth Carnall—Chief Executive: West Kent Authority

Miss Barbara Dicks—Chair of the RCN Cancer Nursing Society: Royal Marsden Hospital

Mr. Len Fenwick—Chief Executive: Freeman Group of Hospitals NHS Trust

Dr. Howard Freeman—General Practitioner: London

Dr. Clive Harner—Consultant Department of Radiotherapy and Oncology: Royal Marsden Hospital

Professor Bob Haward—Professor of Cancer Studies: University of Leeds

Dr. Arthur Hibble—Chairman: RCGP Cancer Group

Professor David J Kerr—Professor of Clinical Oncology: University of Birmingham

Mr. David Kirby—Patient Representative

Dr. Azim Lakhani—Central Health Outcomes Unit: Public Health Division

Mr. David Lye—Director of Purchaser Performance Management: West Midlands Regional Office, Department of Health

Mr. Colin McIlwain—Waiting Times: National Health Service Executive

Ms. Jane McKessack—General Health Services: National Health Service Executive

Dr. Rajan Madhok—Director of Public Health: Gateshead and South Tynesdie Health Authority

Mrs. Becky Miles—National Cancer Alliance

Mrs. Jackie Murray—Regional Cancer Co-odinator: Northern and Yorkshire Regional Office, Department of Health

Mr. Graeme Poston—Directorate of General Surgery: Royal Liverpool University Hospital

Dr. Tim Riley—Head of Outcomes and Effectiveness—National Health Service Executive

Dr. David Rosin—Consultant Surgeon: St Mary's NHS Trust

Mr. J H Shepherd—Consultant Gynaecological Surgeon and Oncologist: St Bartholomew's Hospital

Mrs. Gill Oliver—Director of Patient Services: Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS Trust

Professor Mike Richards—Sainsbury Professor of Palliative Medicine: St Thomas' Hospital

Professor Irving Taylor—BASO President: University College London Medical School

A copy of the group's report has been placed in the Library.

Eye Scans

Noman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the potential health implications resulting from *(a)* repeated iris scans and *(b)* repeated retina scans. [71796]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* The use of iris or retinal scanning systems in order to verify the identity of an individual is a relatively new development. This Department and the Health and Safety Executive are not aware of any evidence that repeated scanning is likely to be a health and safety problem for users. Existing health and safety law requires employers wishing to market and use this technology to undertake an adequate risk assessment of its safety so that appropriate control measures can be specified and used as necessary.

Patient Journey Times

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average time is a patient travelled to reach *(a)* a NHS dentist and *(b)* a general practitioner in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [72382]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is not held centrally.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of recent research into Inflammatory Bowel Disease; what plans he has to act on the findings; and if he will make a statement. [72182]

Mr. Lammy: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on infliximab for Crohn's Disease in May 2002. The Department has not made a separate assessment of recent research into Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD).

It is anticipated that the NICE guidance will help the estimated 5 per cent of patients who have severe Crohn's Disease. Infliximab has not been recommended by NICE as a possible treatment for sufferers of ulcerative colitis.

The Medical Research Council funds several projects on basic mechanisms regulating the function of the gastrointestinal tract in normal and disease function, dietary regulation of intestinal function, cellular and molecular mechanisms of gastrointestinal diseases and neuroendocrine control of the gut. Increasing our understanding of how the intestine functions will facilitate the development of therapeutic agents to treat acute intestinal inflammation and chronic diseases such as Crohn's and IBD.

NHS Treatment Entitlement

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 July 2002, ref. 69433, who meets the cost of treatment by general practitioners of persons who are not entitled to NHS treatment; how many people who are not entitled to NHS treatment have been treated at NHS expense in the last year for which information is available; and what steps he takes to ensure recovery of the costs. [72551]

Ms Blears: General practitioners may not provide National Health Service treatment other than emergency or immediately necessary treatment to persons who are not eligible for inclusion on their patient lists. They may however treat such patients privately. No data are held on the incidence or costs of such treatment.

Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust has not received funding for the Salisbury Alcohol and Drugs Advisory Service; and if he will make a statement. [71791]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership National Health Service Trust has received funding, both mainstream and ring fenced monies, however, decisions on the funding of individual alcohol and drug treatment services are made at local level.

I understand that an accounting error has led to a shortfall in relation to the service in Salisbury and that this is being addressed by the South Wiltshire Primary Care Trust and Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust.

Asthma

Ms Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent reports into the causes of asthma his Department has commissioned; what assessment his Department has made of these reports; and if he will make a statement. [71399]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* We have commissioned no recent reports into the causes of asthma. We have, however, sponsored extensive research on asthma and respiratory disease-related issues.

Our current research programme concentrates on practice improvement. The National Asthma Campaign (NAC), the leading voluntary organisation with an interest in asthma, manages the National Health Service research and development programme on asthma management. This has supported 33 projects throughout the United Kingdom at a total cost of £4.9 million since 1996. The strategy aims to create a research based health service in which reliable and relevant information is used to make decisions on health policy, clinical practice and management of services.

The overall spend on asthma research for the Medical Research Council (MRC) and Department was almost £4 million in 1999–2000 and £12.2 million including other respiratory disorders. The Departmental spend on directly commissioned research projects on asthma since 1997 is an estimated £7.24 million.

The Department's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants has produced an interim statement on the effects of air pollution on asthma. This was in response to a series of articles published by the *Independent on Sunday* that claimed that air pollution caused asthma. The interim statement is available on the Committee's website at www.doh.gov.uk/comeap

A subgroup of the Committee has also now been set up to review the subject in more detail, and will report in 2003. The Department will consider this report carefully when it is published. The overall spend on asthma research for the MRC and the Department was almost £4 million in 1999–2000, and £12.2 million including other respiratory disorders. The Department's spend on directly commissioned research projects on asthma since 1997 is an estimated £7.24 million.

MRSA

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MRSA incidents have been *(a)* voluntarily and *(b)* mandatorily reported in each NHS region since 1996 (i) in total and (ii) as a ratio to the population in that region. [72149]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* We are unable to supply these data as information on incidents which are defined as three or more patients with the same strain in the same hospital in one calendar month is no longer compiled. The following table shows the number of bacteraemia reports per 100,000 head of population for each region. Data for the voluntary reporting system are available from 1996 but are known to be incomplete. Mandatory reporting was introduced in April 2001 and the first year's data are provided.

Number of methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus bacteraemia laboratory reports and rate per 100,000 population Voluntary laboratory surveillance: 1996–2001*

	1996		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
North East	10	0.39	46	1.78	138	5.35	143	5.55	185	7.18	179	6.95
Yorkshire & Humberside	50	0.73	130	1.89	197	2.86	181	2.63	314	4.55	378	5.48
East Midlands	40	0.79	130	2.57	143	2.83	215	4.25	331	6.54	404	7.99
Eastern	159	3.78	271	6.44	364	8.65	442	10.50	477	11.34	604	14.35
London	327	6.13	447	8.38	422	7.91	458	8.58	549	10.29	525	9.84
South East	228	4.18	321	5.88	375	6.87	404	7.40	564	10.33	724	13.26
South West	87	1.18	191	2.59	191	2.59	305	4.14	373	5.06	479	6.49
West Midlands	267	3.29	336	4.14	396	4.88	498	6.14	771	9.50	817	10.07
North West	105	2.11	173	3.48	295	5.93	367	7.38	365	7.34	453	9.11
England	1,273	2.55	2,045	4.09	2,521	5.04	3,013	6.03	3,929	7.8[illegible]	4,563	9.13

Mandatory surveillance: April 2001–March 2002

	Number	Rate
North East	363	14.08
Yorkshire and Humberside	714	10.36
East Midlands	543	10.74
Eastern	744	17.68
London	1555	29.15
South East	1012	18.54
South West	696	9.44
West Midlands	761	9.38
North West	870	17.49
England	7258	14.52

2000 Population by Region

	ONS Population 2000
North East	2,677,346
Yorkshire and Humberside	6,893,932
East Midlands	5,057,915
Eastern	4,207,925
London	5,335,361
South East	5,459,606
South West	7,375,065
West Midlands	8,114,848
North West	4,975,091
England	49,997,089

*2000 regional population data used as denominators for all rate calculations

Correspondence

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the leter of 10 June 2002 from the hon. Member for Twickenham on Lynde House. [71798]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on Monday 12 August 2002.

Newborn Hearing Screening

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will place in the Library the lists of sites considered for the second phase of the newborn hearing screening programme; [72602]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 17 June 2002, *Official Report,* column 164W, on newborn hearing screening, how many sites will provide newborn screening by the end of *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004, and when the funding for each stage of this process will be committed. [72489]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* A list of the sites considered for the second phase of the newborn hearing screening programme will be placed in the Library.

Twenty-three sites are currently providing newborn hearing screening. We expect to bring on a further 16 sites by the end of March 2003, with approximately 30 additional sites during the financial year 2003–04. The remainder of sites are expected to come on stream by the end of the financial year 2004–05.

Departmental Jobs

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and (vi) overseas, broken down by (A) whole time equivalent jobs and (B) the pecentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72735]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Dept/Body/Organisation	Countries covered	(i) Scotland		(ii) Rest of England		(iii) London		(iv) Wales		(v) Northern Ireland		(vi) Overseas		Total FTE
		No (FTE)	%age	No (FTE)	%age	No (FTE)	%age	No (FTE)	%age	No (FTE)	%age	No (FTE)	%age	
(a) Core Department (excluding agencies)	England	0	0.0	1,651.7	31.2	1,983.7	37.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3,635.4
(b) Commission for Health Improvement	England & Wales	0	0.0	0	0.0	184.0	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	184.0
(b) General Social Care Council	England	0	0.0	19.9	24.7	60.8	75.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	80.7

Dept/Body/Organisation	Countries covered	(i) Scotland No (FTE)	(i) Scotland %age	(ii) Rest of England No (FTE)	(ii) Rest of England %age	(iii) London No (FTE)	(iii) London %age	(iv) Wales No (FTE)	(iv) Wales %age	(v) Northern Ireland No (FTE)	(v) Northern Ireland %age	(vi) Overseas No (FTE)	(vi) Overseas %age	Total FTE
(b) Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority	UK	0	0.0	0	0.0	34.0	100.0	0	0.00	0	0.0	0	0.0	34.0
(b) National Biological Standards Board (UK)	UK	0	0.0	236.0	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	236.0
(b) National Care Standards Commission	England	0	0.0	1,642	89.7	189.0	10.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1,831
(b) National Radiological Protection Board	UK	26.0	9.0	285.0	91.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	311.0
(b) Public Health Laboratory Service	UK	0	0.0	1,945.0	65.9	742.0	25.1	255.0	8.6	5.0	0.1	0	0.0	2,947.0
(c) Medicine Controls Agency	UK	0	0.0	24.1	0.5	431.3	8.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	455.4
(c) Medical Devices Agency	UK wide for regulatory activities. As DH in respect of all other business activities.	0	0.0	8.8	0.2	129.0	2.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	137.8
(c) NHS Estates	England	0	0.0	302.6	5.7	20.0	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	322.6
(c) NHS Pensions Agency	England & Wales	0	0.0	445.1	8.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	445.1
(c) NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency	England (Although a few contracts are shared throughout the UK)	0	0.0	291.2	5.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	291.2
(d) see note 1 & 2														

Key
(a) Core Department (excluding agencies)
(b) Non-departmental public bodies
(c) Executive agency
(d) Independent statutory body, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by department

Notes
[1]Information on Independent statutory bodies listed is not held.
The General Chiropratic Council
The General Dental Council
The General Medical Council
The General Optical Council
The General Osteopathic Council
The Health Professions Council
The Nursing and Midwifery Council
The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
[2]The Department does not hold information on numbers or location details for organisation and bodies financially sponsored by the Deparetment.
Percentage score for A & C, when added together, equals 100%

Teenage Pregnancy

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the teenage pregnancy rate in Taunton was at the latest date for which figures are available. [73271]

Ms Blears: The under 18 conception rate for the Taunton Deane District Council area was 40.2 per thousand for the period 1998–2000, the latest period for which data have been published by the Office for National Statistics. Teenage pregnancy rates are usually measured by the under 18 conception rate. The teenage pregnancy strategy has set a target to halve the national rate by 2010.

The corresponding rates for Somerset County, the south west region and England were 38.0, 37.4 and 44.9 respectively.

Heroin

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* studies and *(b)* pilots have been undertaken since 1972 into the impact on (i) crime levels and (ii) health indicators of prescribing heroin. [66662]

Ms Blears: There is very limited United Kingdom research in the area of heroin prescribing. Given the current use of injectable methadone in the UK and also a smaller number of opiate addicted individuals currently receiving injectable heroin, potentially there are difficulties in recruitment to suitably sized and rigorous research studies. Those studies that have been reported from the UK since 1972 do not give definitive results as to the effect of heroin treatment on health and crime but indicate potential benefits and risks.

Hartnoll et al (1980) reported a London study carried out in the early 1970's comprising injectable heroin and oral methadone treatment in patients assessed as dependent on heroin. There were no differences between the two groups in health outcomes at 12 months and no consistent differences in levels of crime identified though there were methodological problems in comparing the two groups appropriately.

McCusker et al (1996) reported the introduction of heroin prescribing to one of three English community drug teams but no conclusions could be drawn about the impact of the heroin treatment and outcomes due to the methodology used.

Battersby et al (1992) in a descriptive study of injectable opiates are reported to have shown reductions in illicit drug use and criminality with little improvementshown in health, also raising some concerns about continued unsafe injecting practice.

Metrebian et al (1998) studied the use of either injectable heroin or injectable methadone for those doing badly on oral methadone. This suggested that the use of injectable methadone could be a viable alternative to injectable heroin in some and that the use of injectable opiate treatment in those who had failed oral treatments could lead to improvement in those who remained in treatment, in health and levels of criminal activity. They concluded that injectable heroin is not necessarily the drug of choice given the availability of injectable methadone.

The more recently reported Swiss and Dutch studies are not directly applicable to the UK context, the Swiss study being in effect a feasibility study. However, both have produced results indicating the possibility of benefits for health and crime, for a minority of patients who are carefully selected long term opiate addicts who have failed in other treatments including oral methadone treatment.

No pilots have been identified that contribute to assessing the impact of injectable heroin on health and crime.

Treatment (Postcode Prescribing)

Mr. Andrew Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent representations he has *(a)* made and *(b)* received about the non-prescribing of NICE approved treatment by primary care trusts on financial grounds; and if he will make a statement; [71916]

(2) what recent representations he has *(a)* made to and *(b)* received from primary care trusts and other NHS trusts about the continuation of postcode lottery in the prescribing of treatment; and if he will make a statement. [71917]

Mr. Lammy The Department has made no such representations and according to the Department's records, none have been received recently from primary care trusts (PCTs) and other National Health Service trusts about the alleged continuation of postcode prescribing of treatments.

PCTs are under a statutory obligation, set out in directions, to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

PCTs have been made aware of these statutory obligations. I have not made any representations about alleged non-compliance with them, nor according to the Department's records, have any such representations been received.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 15 October 2002

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Overseas Territories (Statistical Information)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, on overseas territories, to what extent the overseas territories differ in their system for the collection and publication of statistics; and which publish details within these statistics that constitute national income accounts. [71569]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 22 July 2002]:* There is no common method used throughout the UK Overseas Territories for the collection and publication of statistical information. Of the economically significant Overseas Territories, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, St. Helena and Turks and Caicos Islands regularly produce and publish details within these statistics that constitute National Income Accounts. Gibraltar has recently published a compendium of statistics after a gap of several years.

Sheikh Salah Shahada

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government on the death of Sheikh Salah Shahada and others on 22 July. [73380]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I spoke to the Israeli Ambassador on 23 July to express the concern of the Government and the House about the Israeli attack in Gaza and the deaths of innocent civilians. I said it was unacceptable and counterproductive, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had earlier told the House. HM Ambassador in Tel Aviv conveyed the same views to the Israeli Prime Minister's office.

Data Protection

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times the revised certificate he signed last December with respect to Section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1998 has been used by the Intelligence Service and GCHQ in relation to *(a)* the right of access to personal data and *(b)* the disclosure of personal data to the Service or GCHQ; and if he will make a statement. [74481]

Mr. Straw: The certificates I signed pursuant to section 28 (2) of the Data Protection Act 1998 relating to SIS and GCHQ provide evidence that the exemption from those provisions of the Act that are specified in the certificate are required for the purpose of safeguarding national security. The certificates identify the personal data to which they apply by means of general descriptions and are expressed to have prospective effect, in accordance with section 28 (3). The certificates are used in the context of any legal challenge to the application of the section 28 exemption, such as appeals brought before the Information Tribunal under section 28 (4) or 28 (6). There have been no appeals against the certificate in respect of SIS and there have been two against the certificate in respect of GCHQ, which are still extant.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many subject access requests have been received by the Intelligence Service and GCHQ since the right of access afforded by the Data Protection Act 1998 came into effect; how many of these requests were from data subjects who were not employed or contracted to the Service; and whether any request for access has resulted in personal data being obtained by data subjects. [74480]

Mr. Straw: The Secret Intelligence Service has received 80 requests for subject access since the Data Protection Act 1998 came into force. Of those, 37 were from individuals not employed by or under contract to the Service. GCHQ has received 25 requests from individuals not employed by or under contract to GCHQ, of which 2 were from former employees. Personal data has been provided by both agencies to data subjects in both categories in response to requests in accordance with Section 7 of the Act.

Chagos Islands

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Ilois people had UK passports issued to them under the terms of the Immigration and Nationality Act 1971; and how many were issued in *(a)* Mauritius, *(b)* the Seychelles, *(c)* London and *(d)* other places. [74657]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The current legislation under which passports are issued is the British Nationality Act 1981, as amended by the British Overseas Territories Act 2002.

The number of British passports issued to Chagossians in Mauritius and the Seychelles is 98 and 63 respectively. An additional 80 passports have been issued in Pretoria. Details of ethnic origin would not be recorded for British passports issued elsewhere and therefore numbers are unavailable.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being considered by BIOT officials for the Ilois people to visit the Chagos Islands, including Diego Garcia; and if he will make a statement. [74655]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A planned trip in October 02 to enable a group of Chagossians to visit the outer islands of the Chagos Archipelago could not go ahead due to the withdrawal of the vessel by the shipping company. We are ready to consider reinstating the voyage next year once the cyclone season (Nov–April) is over.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what applications he has received from the USA to construct new aircraft hangars on Diego Garcia; and if he will make a statement. [74654]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The issue of possible upgrades to facilities at Diego Garcia has been discussed at annual talks between the UK and US governments. The details of these governmental talks are confidential and exempt under section 1a of The Code of practice on Access to Government Information, "Information whose disclosure would harm national security or defence".

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what the Government's policy is on the future status of the British Indian Ocean Territory; [74191]

(2) what options are being considered by the Government after the expiration of the agreement granting the United States joint military use of Diego Garcia. [74193]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The British Government has a treaty commitment to allow the US to use BIOT until at least 2016, and then for a further 20 years unless prior notice is given. We have told the Government of Mauritius that the Chagos Islands will be ceded to Mauritius when they are no longer required for defence purposes, subject to the requirements of international law.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the claims of Mauritius and the Seychelles to the Chagos Archipelago of British Indian Ocean Territory. [74192]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The British Government has sovereignty over the Chagos Islands. Mauritius is the only other state to have a claim to sovereignty. The British Government has told the Government of Mauritius that the Chagos Islands will be ceded to Mauritius when they are longer required for defence purposes, subject to the requirements of international law. Seychelles makes no claim to sovereignty over the Chagos Islands.

Western Sahara

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have been held at the UN concerning a referendum of Saharwi people on the future of the Western Sahara. [74662]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The future of Western Sahara has been discussed at the UN recently in both the Security Council and the General Assembly.

On 30 July 2002 the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1429. This extended the mandate of the UN's peacekeeping force in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 31 January 2003. It underlined the validity of the Settlement Plan, which provided for a referendum on the future of Western Sahara, while noting the differences between the parties in its implementation. It supported the efforts of the Secretary General and his Personal Envoy to find a political solution to the dispute. The Council expressed its readiness to consider any approach that provided for self determination and urged the parties to cooperate fully with them.

The Fourth Committee of the General Assembly recently debated the question of Western Sahara and agreed a resolution by Consensus debated on 4 October 2002. That resolution noted the Security Council's recent resolutions, including 1429. It urged the parties to continue their cooperation with the Secretary General and his Personal Envoy with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable political solution.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his statement of 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 960, if he will place in the Library details of his information about the similar amount to the $11 million paid on or about 23 December 1988 paid 18 months before. [73716]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I can add nothing to that which I gave my hon. Friend on 23 July 2002. It is a longstanding Government policy not to comment upon intelligence matters. As I said to my hon. Friend in the House on 23 July 2002, I am informed that after the bombing of Pan Am 103, all reports of PFLP-GC funding that emerged were investigated and none was found to have any connection to the Lockerbie attack.

EU General Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held on 23 July; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [73529]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary represented the UK at the July Council. The Council adopted the "A" points listed in document 12354/1/02 PTS A 44 and noted the Resolutions, Decisions and Opinions of the European Parliament listed in document 10110/02.

Presidency Priorities

The Presidency presented its work programme, with emphasis on completing enlargement negotiations with up to 10 countries by Copenhagen. Greece, which will preside over Council discussions with defence implications, briefed on ESDP priorities, particularly progress towards the Headline Goal.

Enlargement

The Presidency presented its programme, underlining its commitment to respect the targets set by the European Council. This involves aiming to resolve all remaining non-budgetary aspects by September, with the objective of the Brussels European Council naming the countries that could conclude negotiations by the end of 2002 and taking decisions which will enable the EU to inform the candidates early in November about the financial aspects of the package. The UK strongly supports this approach.

Seville European Council: Follow-up

The Council adopted revised rules of procedure, incorporating the changes agreed at Seville and setting out the role and future areas of activity of the General Affairs and External Relations Council. The UK

welcomes the reforms agreed at Seville. The Commission noted its intention to complete by September, as requested at Seville, a study on options for resolution of the transit issue affecting Kaliningrad.

Work in other Council Formations

The Presidency briefed, in particular noting the first discussion in the 15 July Agriculture Council of the mid-term review of the CAP, the debate in the 12 July ECOFIN on negotiations with Switzerland on taxation of savings and in the 19 July ECOFIN on the draft 2003 budget.

Zimbabwe

The Council confirmed that Zimbabwe was continuing to fail to respect its obligations in democracy, human rights and rule of law. The Council, with strong UK support, decided to extend the list of those in the ruling party and government affected by the EU measures set out in the 18 February Common Position. This will include all remaining Cabinet Ministers, Politburo Secretaries, Deputy Ministers, Assistant Secretaries of the Politburo and the wife of President Mugabe. The Council condemned the Mugabe government's land reforms as a major cause of the humanitarian crisis and urged Zimbabwe to implement the process agreed at Abuja in September 2001 and to review its land reform as proposed by UNDP in early 2002. The EU will continue to supply humanitarian aid to the people of Zimbabwe.

Southern Africa

The Council discussed the humanitarian crisis in the region, noting the EU's contribution of €130 million in food and humanitarian aid. It called on the governments in the region to work with the international community to address the underlying causes of the crisis.

Conflict Prevention

The CFSP High Representative and Commissioner Patten briefed on EU priorities in Conflict Prevention. The Council adopted Conclusions welcoming this work, and tasking the Political and Security Committee to keep it under review.

Middle East

Council Conclusions welcomed the outcome of the EU/US/UN/Russia ("Quartet") meeting on 16 July and stressed the need for parallel work on economic, political and security issues. The Council underlined the need for a roadmap towards the goal, within 3 years, of a final settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The Council endorsed the appeal by the Quartet for Israel to lift closures, withdraw their forces to positions held before 28 September 2000, resume transfer of revenues due to the Palestinian Authority and to stop settlement activity. The Council condemned the recent terrorist acts against Israeli civilians. The Council urged Israel to refrain from unjustified deportations.

Western Balkans

Conclusions called for protection of the rights of refugees and internally displaced across the region, for enhanced co-operation between states, noted progress in the FRY, including the recent understanding between the FRY and UNMIK in Kosovo, and noted forthcoming elections in Macdeonia and Bosnia.

Afghanistan

Conclusions welcomed the outcome of the Loya Jirga and the new transitional government, and welcomed Turkey's assumption of command of the international force (ISAF). The Council noted the recent appointment of Fransesc Vendrell as EU Special Representative.

India/Pakistan

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary briefed colleagues on his recent trip to India and Pakistan. Ministers underlined the importance that the elections in Pakistan and in Jammu and Kashmir to be held later in the year be free and fair. They invited SG/HR Solana to make this clear during his forthcoming visit to the region.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

The Presidency briefed on preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to take place in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002. The Council adopted Conclusions on the key messages for an EU Communication strategy for Johannesburg and on EU initiatives based on the Conclusions of the Seville European Council.

Madagascar

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in Madagascar; and what recent action has been undertaken by representatives of Her Majesty's Government to protect free elections and the furtherance of democracy and defence of democratic institutions in Madagascar. [74157]

Mr. Macshane: On 24 September, Marc Ravalomanana, the President of Madagascar, announced that he would be dissolving the National Assembly and holding legislative elections before the end of the year. He sought international assistance to ensure that the elections would be held in a free and transparent manner.

UK election observers will form part of a 62 strong EU Election Observer team that will monitor the legislative elections. A contingent of 14 observers will arrive four weeks in advance of the elections to monitor the campaign, the investitures and official registration of candidates. The remainder of the team will arrive a week before the election date.

Our Embassy, along with EU colleagues, the US and major donors in Madagascar, will continue to work constructively with the Government of Madagascar to promote democratic governance and transparency.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 9 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. E. Stephen. [74563]

Mr. Macshane: A reply was sent on 19 September. I apologise for the delay.

MOX Fuel

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library details of the representations made to the United Kingdom from en route countries in respect of the return shipment of rejected MOX fuel from Japan to Sellafield. [73552]

Mr. Macshane: The New Zealand High Commissioner called on the FCO on 12 July to make a formal representation regarding the return shipment of MOX fuel from Japan to Sellafield. This was an oral rather than written representation. There have been no other representations from en route countries in respect of this shipment.

Nigeria

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Nigeria about the decision under Sharia law to stone to death Amina Lawal. [74324]

Mr. Macshane: During her recent visit to Nigeria my noble Friend the Minister for Africa, the Baroness Amos, raised with President Obasanjo HMG's concerns about the harsh sentences imposed under the Sharia penal codes. She emphasised the strength of feeling against them in the UK and reiterated HMG's opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances.

The British High Commission in Abuja, together with EU partners, follows all such cases closely and keeps in close contact with local human rights organisations. The High Commission regularly raises our concerns about the sentences with the appropriate authorities.

The Federal Government has made clear its opposition to the extreme Sharia penalties. It has declared them discriminatory and unconstitutional. Exercise of the Sharia penal code is, however, entirely under the control of the relevant States. The Federal justice system only comes into play if the defendant appeals to the Federal Appeal Courts.

Gibraltar

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the dates were of the 16 ministerial level meetings held under the Brussels Process between November 1984 and February 1999. [73981]

Peter Hain: Between November 1984 and February 1999, ministerial level meetings took place on: 26–27 November 1984; 5–6 February and 6 December 1985; 13–14 January, 27–28 November and 2 December 1987; 10 June 1988; 6–7 February 1989; 26 February 1990; 12 February 1991; 4 May 1992; 1 March 1993; 19–20 December 1994; 19 June 1995; and 22 January and 10 December 1997.

Since the relaunch of the Brussels Process in July 2001, three Brussels Process ministerial meetings have been held: on 26 July and 20 November 2001 and on 4 February 2002.

Mongolia

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Government of Mongolia over the case of Ms B. Khanddolgar, Editor-in-Chief of the UG newspaper, recently imprisoned for alleged slander; and if he will make a statement. [74510]

Mr. MacShane: The editor of the Mongolian "Ug" newspaper was sentenced to one year's imprisonment after publishing a story claiming that a private citizen had contracted AIDS following alleged affairs with Russian border guards. The allegations proved false. "Ug" issued an apology, but the citizen had already been killed by her partner. This was the fourth time that "Ug" had been taken to court facing similar charges.

In discussion with ministers, editors and journalists in Mongolia last month I made clear the importance the government attaches to freedom of expression and for the need to check facts carefully and avoid publishing allegations made for sensationalist or sectarian purposes.

Export Licences

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Strategic Export Controls report 2001. [74664]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Mr. Jeff Ennis) on 19 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 611W.

The 2001 Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls was published on 19 July. The annual reports were an innovation of this Government and have opened our policy to unprecedented public scrutiny. We maintain one of the most effective and transparent export licensing system in the World.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the applications for the export of military equipment to *(a)* the United States and *(b)* Israel which have been turned down since May 1997. [73563]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

Details of all relevant applications for the export of items on the Military List, where the end users were in the United States of America and Israel, which were refused between 2 May 1997 and 31 December 2001, are published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 Annual Reports are available from the Libraries of the House.

Between 1 January 2002 and 15 July 2002, 42 Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications and 1 Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) application were refused in full, for items on the Military List, where the end users were in Israel. During the same period 5 SIEL applications and no OIEL applications were refused in full, for items on the Military List, to end users in the United States of America.

Iraq

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps *(a)* have been taken since 1991–92 and *(b)* are being taken to ensure the compliance of Iraq with Paragraph 30 of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 687; and if he will make a statement. [74665]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A Tripartite Commission was set up under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross to establish the whereabouts of Kuwaiti and other nationals still missing since the occupation of Kuwait. So far, the Iraqis have provided information sufficient to close only three files. 605 Kuwaiti and other nationals are still unaccounted for. Since January 1999 Iraq has refused to attend Tripartite Commission meetings, and has thereby effectively obstructed progress. The UK, along with other members of the Tripartite Commission, continue to meet regularly. Despite our and others' efforts to convince Iraq of the humanitarian nature of this issue, Iraq still refuses to co-operate with the process.

Beryllium

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department had with the Department for Trade and Industry regarding the decision to license the export of beryllium to *(a)* India and *(b)* Iran in 2001. [74698]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Views expressed by any individual department involved in the licensing process fall under the description of "internal discussion and advice" the disclosure of which would in this case harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion. The information is therefore being withheld on the basis of Exemption 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Sri Lanka

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what refreshment provisions are available to members of the public at the British Embassy in Sri Lanka. [74114]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All members of the public who are waiting in the visa waiting room in our High Commission in Colombo have access to a chilled water dispenser. The visa and consular section in the British High Commission has just been awarded its second Charter Mark for excellence in customer services. The Charter Mark was obtained in 1998 and the award retained on re-inspection earlier this year.

Afghanistan

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Afghanistan Government's strategy for its fight against drugs; and what the UK's role was in the development of this strategy. [73786]

Mr. Macshane: The Afghan Transitional Administration has made clear its determination to break Afghanistan's social and economic dependence on drugs. On 4 September President Karzai reiterated in a radio broadcast to the Afghan people his personal commitment to the implementation of the ban on drug cultivation, processing and trafficking introduced in January. The Afghan government has already carried out an eradication programme.

The UK is co-ordinating international anti-narcotics assistance to Afghanistan. In consultation with the Afghan Government, other donors and international (especially UN) agencies, the UK has developed a strategy for the long term elimination of drugs from Afghanistan. It identifies four key areas where the international community should focus its support: providing alternative livelihoods for opium poppy farmers; improving Afghan drug law enforcement capacity; building up the capacity of Afghan drug control institutions; and reducing drug demand in Afghanistan.

East Timor

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indonesian authorities over the conduct of General Wiranto during the East Timorese ballot in 1999. [73423]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK has not raised with the Indonesian authorities the specific case of General Wiranto. The EU has however urged the Indonesian government to extend the jurisdiction of their Ad Hoc Tribunal to cover all human rights violations perpetrated in East Timor before, during and after the ballot in 1999.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Saville Inquiry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost to the Saville Tribunal was of the temporary relocation of proceedings in London. [74178]

Mr. Desmond Browne: The estimated cost of the temporary relocation to London of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry is £15 million.

Terrorist-related Activity

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Irish Republicans who have been charged with terrorist-related activity since 1972 have been members of Sinn Fein. [74277]

Jane Kennedy: Statistics are not recorded on the political party affiliation of persons charged with terrorist related offences.

Police Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recommendations were made by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary following completion of his review into the performance of the PSNI Special Branch. [74175]

Jane Kennedy: Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary has not yet completed his review of the Special Branch of the Police Service of Northern

Ireland. He is scheduled to make a presentation of his findings to the Northern Ireland Policing Board on 6th November.

Electoral Identity Card

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional financial and staff resources will be put in place to ensure the provision of the statutory electoral identity card prior to the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 1 May 2003. [74286]

Mr. Desmond Browne: £750,000 has already been allocated to provide for the electoral identity card and a member of staff has been seconded from the Northern Ireland Office to act as a project manager in implementing all the requirements of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act.

The arrangements for the production of the card are the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer. An advert inviting tenders from experienced and competent service providers for the provision of the card was entered in the Official Journal of the European Community (in line with Government procurement guidelines) on 9 September. Tenders are returnable by 4 November.

The Government is committed to providing those people who require one with an electoral identity card in time for the Assembly election on 1 May 2003. In order to achieve this target the Chief Electoral Officer's staffing and resource requirements will be kept under review.

Criminal Justice Website

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the objectives are of the Criminal Justice Web Site; what steps he has taken to publicise its launch; how many media outlets reported the event; and how many hits were made in the first month. [74169]

Mr. Desmond Browne: The objectives of the Criminal Justice System Northern Ireland website are:

To provide a "one-stop shop" for information on all criminal justice matters.

To increase public awareness by providing access to all the criminal justice agencies on one site.

To provide a resource for the public and criminal justice practitioners in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

Each criminal justice agency is responsible for promoting the website within its own organisation and amongst its contacts and partners. In addition, the Northern Ireland Office issued a press release to all the main local media outlets on 2 August 2002.

One media outlet reported the event.

The site received 21,856 hits in the first month, August.

DNA Analysis

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* instructions were drawn up for and *(b)* safeguards were used by PSNI officers in the Newtownabbey area to protect against right to privacy violations in the use of DNA analysis to re-examine forensic evidence collected in unresolved murder investigations; what the results were of these examinations; and what his assessment is of this experiment. [74170]

Jane Kennedy: The Police in Newtownabbey are conducting a self-inspection of unresolved murders applying forensic technology, including DNA, as appropriate. Any DNA results obtained will be examined against the DNA database. The management of the DNA database is governed by legislation, including the European Convention on Human Rights.

The investigations are ongoing so it is not possible to provide an assessment at this time.

DEFENCE

Secondments

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of staff were employed by his Department on secondment from the private sector in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [45258]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 19.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33208]

Dr. Moonie: No staff have been seconded between the Ministry of Defence and any of these companies during the period from 1999 to the present.

Private Military Companies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what deployments include the use of private military companies' services *(a)* in Britain and *(b)* abroad; what the additional cost is of using mercenary troops rather than British troops; and if he will make a statement. [38798]

Mr. Ingram: The Green Paper entitled Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation published on 12 February 2002, highlights the problem of defining a private military company. It notes that their services may include provision of forces for combat, but much more usually, services such as advice, training, logistic support, supply of personnel for monitoring roles, and de-mining operations. In practice, a wide spectrum of people and companies may be involved in the supply of military and security services.

The Ministry of Defence does not employ commercial contractors to provide forces for combat or armed guards. The MOD does, however, utilise the services of commercial contractors where appropriate and cost effective in a number of areas on deployments both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Contracted services are primarily in the areas of logistic support services, e.g. provision of accommodation, catering and maintenance. We also employ local host nation support (e.g. for food supplies

and locally employed cleaning and interpreters). Similarly commercial contractors may also be employed to provide advice, support, training and maintenance on equipment supplied to the forces.

Such services are provided on the majority of UK deployments in some form, and are contracted separately by individual commands. This information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Government have to use private military companies' services; in which sectors of the armed forces these will be used; and if he will make a statement. [38797]

Mr. Adam Ingram: The Government has no plans to engage the services of commercial contractors to provide forces for combat, but will continue to use commercial contractors to provide a range of services, both in the United Kingdom and overseas, wherever it is appropriate and cost effective to do so.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many private military companies he estimates exist in the UK; and how many UK nationals he estimates are employed by these companies. [73953]

Mr. Ingram: The Green Paper entitled Private Military Companies: Options for Regulation published on 12 February 2002, highlights the problem of defining a private military company. In practice, a wide spectrum of people and companies may be involved in the supply of military and security services.

The Paper notes that services of private military companies may include provision of forces for combat, but much more usually, services such as advice, training, logistic support, supply of personnel for monitoring roles, and de-mining operations.

Given this wide range of activities combined with the definitional problems, there are numerous sectors of industry that could potentially provide such services. It is therefore not possible to make such an estimate.

Medical Services

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* RAF budgets were for medical provisions in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [57971]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The costs of the Defence Medical Services (DMS) in the years for which figures are available are shown in the table below. Information for the years 1992–1993 to 1997–1998 is reproduced from the House of Commons Defence Committee (HCDC) Seventh report "The Strategic Defence Review: Defence Medical Services" published on 27 October 1999. The final outturn for 1998–1999 shown in the table was the same as the estimated figure contained in the HCDC Report. For the years 1999–2000 onwards, we have obtained figures from Surgeon General's Department (SGD) (covering SGD and the four medical agencies), single Service Medical Directorates General, HQ British Forces Germany, the Institute of Naval Medicine and the Centre for Aviation Medicine. The budgets for primary care have been disaggregated down to unit level and these figures could therefore only be provided at disproportionate cost. Some historical figures cannot be provided as contemporary records are no longer available.

Royal Navy, Army and RAF expenditure on medical provision in financial years 1992–1993 to 2001–2002

	1992–1993	*1993–1994*	*1994–1995*	*1995–1996*	*1996–1997*	*1997–1998*	*1998–1999*	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*	*2001–2002*
£M COST OF DMS	N/A	N/A	330.6	333.0	257.7	273.5	291.5	320.16	332.88	348.89

Notes:

1. Expenditure for 1992–1993 and 1993–1994 cannot be provided since figures ceased to be published in the Statement on the Defence Estimates after 1991 when budgets were disaggregated and contemporary records are no longer available.
2. Figures for 1994–1995 and 1995–1996 are the cost of the DMS estimated by Defence Cost Study 15(DCS15). The figures contained in the DCS15 report included primary care costs, estimated at £83.5 million for 1994–1995 and £81.1 million for 1995–1996. These have been removed here to allow accurate comparison with the figures for the subsequent years.
3. Figures for 1996–1997 to 2001–2002 comprise the costs of the Surgeon General's Department and the four medical agencies (the Defence Secondary Care Agency, Defence Dental Agency, the Medical Supplies Agency and the Defence Medical Training Organisation), the single Service Medical Directorates General, the Institute of Naval Medicine, the Centre for Aviation Medicine and British Forces Germany. Except for British Forces Germany, the figures exclude primary care costs. Figures for Germany cover secondary care for Army and RAF personnel and primary care for Army personnel from 1996–1997 to 2000–2001 and both Army and remaining RAF personnel in 2001–2002.
4. Except where advised above, primary care costs cannot be provided without disproportionate effort as they are disaggregated and are embedded in individual units' budgets.
5. It should be noted that although the Ministry of Defence has changed accounting systems to include full Resource Accounts in financial year 2001–2002 (which include costs of fixed assets etc, not reported previously), the figures contained in the table have been adjusted to allow comparison with the previous years.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49613]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has introduced only one Bill (which became the Armed Forces Act 2001) in the last five years that contains a sunset clause. The clause relates to the annual requirement to continue in force the Army and Air Force Acts 1955 and the Naval Discipline Act 1957 and provides for the three

Service Acts to be continued in force until no later than the end of 2006. The expectation is that by then Parliament will have enacted a further Armed Forces Act, which will extend the lives of the Service Acts for a further five years. This accords with the procedure which Parliament has adopted for this legislation in the past.

Criminal Offences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many criminal offences have been *(a)* created and *(b)* abolished by his Department since 1997. [55437]

Mr. Ingram: One offence has been created in legislation sponsored by the Ministry of Defence since 1997. The Armed Forces Act 2001 included powers, in relation to persons subject to Service law, to test for alcohol or drugs after a serious incident and created the offence of failing to provide a sample in such circumstances. No offences have been abolished since 1997.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South of 26 February, Reference Number 38796, on private military companies; and if he will make a statement. [65761]

Dr. Moonie: I replied to the hon. Member on 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 748W.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer the Question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth South of 26 February, Reference Number 38798, on private military companies; and if he will make a statement. [65760]

Mr. Ingram: I replied today.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South of 26 February, reference number 38797, on private military companies; and if he will make a statement. [65751]

Mr. Ingram: I replied today.

Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the statistics that are collected by his Department by English parliamentary constituency; and if he will make a statement. [67094]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 8 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the letter sent to him by the National Statistician dated 8 July 2002.

Headline Goal

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the Common Foreign and Security Policy's Headline Goal; and if he will make a statement on when the forces will be available for use. [73208]

Mr. Hoon: The Helsinki Headline Goal has been broken down into 144 capability targets, of which 104 had been met following the Capabilities Improvement Conference in November 2001. Of the 40 shortfalls, about half may be resolved by improved management of existing forces. For the rest, a European Capability Action Plan (ECAP) was launched after the conference, comprising multinational panels tasked with suggesting possible solutions. Where a permanent solution is not possible by the end of 2003, interim solutions should be addressed. The European Council in Laeken in December 2001 agreed that the European Union was now able to conduct some crisis management operations and would be in a position to take on progressively more demanding operations as the assets and capabilities at its disposal continue to develop. There is no intention to create a standing EU force: existing national or multinational forces will be made available to the EU on a case by case basis when required for an operation.

Contracts

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the 10 biggest contracts awarded, in terms of initial estimated total cost since 1 May 1997, and provide in each case *(a)* the expected completion dates on contracts being let and *(b)* the expected completion dates achieved. [73948]

Dr. Moonie: The ten biggest contracts by value awarded by the Ministry of Defence since 1 May 1997 are as follows:

BOWMAN Fully Integrated Communications and Information System

A contract for the provision of the BOWMAN fully integrated communications and information system, including manufacture of equipments; test, evaluation and acceptance of the platforms to incorporate them; delivery of converted and commissioned platforms and buildings; provision of integrated logistics support; and supply of documents and publications was placed with General Dynamics United Kingdom on 13 September 2001. The expected completion date is 31 March 2009.

Main Building Redevelopment

A Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract was placed in May 2000 with Modus Services Plc for the redevelopment of the MOD Main Building in London to provide the modern flexible working environment needed to provide effective direction and support to the armed forces. The contract also covers short term decant arrangements as well as the long term provision of a wide variety of services to both the redeveloped Main Building and the Old War Office Building. The contract will be complete in 2030, with reoccupation of Main Building in 2004.

Type 45

A contract was placed in December 2000 with BAE SYSTEMS Electronics Ltd for the demonstration and first of class manufacture phase of the Type 45 programme, covering the design and build of the first three Type 45s plus up to six ship sets of certain major equipment. The original contract acceptance date, based on three ships, is 30 September 2009.

PAAMS

A contract was placed in August 1999 with EUROPAAMS by France on behalf of the United Kingdom, France and Italy for full scale engineering development and initial production of the PAAMS system. The contact covers equipments and missiles required for each of the three nations' "First of Class" ships. The expected completion date is June 2007.

Joint Services Command and Staff College

A PFI contract was placed in June 1998 with Defence Management (Watchfield) for the provision of academic training and support services for students and officers from the United Kingdom Armed Forces and Armed Forces from abroad. The contractor also provides college and ancillary facilities, including married quarters, single living accommodation and construction of some new facilities. The new facilities have been completed and the expected completion date for the remainder of the contract is 31 August 2028.

United Kingdom Fixed Telecommunications

A ten year PFI contract was signed with British Telecommunications Ltd on 25 July 1997 for a strategic rationalisation of the means of delivery and operation of end to end fixed telecommunications service requirements within the United Kingdom, providing for value for money through economies of scale and other measures, whilst ensuring continued operational effectiveness. The expected completion date is 24 July 2007.

Army Foundation College, Harrogate

A thirty year PFI contract was let in February 2000 with Defence Training Services for the provision of vocational training, estate and store management, domestic services and transport at the Army Foundation College in Harrogate. The contract also provides for a comprehensive rebuild of the facilities on the site. The College provides a route of entry into the Army for young people and provides a 42 week course providing Military and Vocational training.

Management and Operation of the Atomic Weapon Establishments

A contract was signed in 1999 with AWE Management Ltd. for the management and operation of the Atomic Weapon Establishments at Aldermaston and Burghfield. The expected completion date of contract when let was 31 March 2010.

C17 Leasing

A contract was let with the McDonnell Douglas Corporation for the lease of four C17 Globe master III aircraft for a seven year period. The expected completion date at the time of contract was September 2008.

Administrative and Non-operational Support Transport Vehicles (the White Fleet)

A Public Private Partnership contract for a ten year period until 31 August 2011 was placed on 26 January 2001 with Lex Defence Management Ltd. The contract includes the provision of administrative and non-operational support transport vehicles, including fleet management, short term hire, vehicle provision, maintenance, repair and disposal, for the United Kingdom excluding Northern Ireland.

As all ten contracts are still running it is not yet possible to provide completion dates achieved.

Defence Intelligence Staff

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the budget of the Defence Intelligence Staff is; how many persons are employed in this section; what the aims and objectives of the DIS are; and if he will make a statement. [73955]

Mr. Ingram: The budget of the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) for the financial year 2002–2003 is as follows:

	£ million
Resource Control	173.85
Capital Control	12.754

There were 3,969 permanent staff employed by the DIS on 31 March 2002. This figure excludes contractors and reservists.

As part of the Ministry of Defence, the principal task of the DIS is to provide defence intelligence support from a wide range of sources, both secret and public, to the preparation and conduct of military operations, the formulation of defence policy and the Equipment Capability programmes. In addition, the DIS contributes from the defence intelligence perspective to the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee, other Government Departments, NATO and the EU Military Staff.

The DIS includes two agencies, the Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency (DGIA) which provides imagery intelligence and geographic support and the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre (DISC) which provides intelligence and security training. Both agencies publish Annual Reports and Accounts which include Key Targets and details of performance against them in accordance with statutory requirements.

Further information about the Defence Intelligence Staff can be found on the MOD's website, www.mod.uk.

US Military Assistance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent of US military assistance by forces resident in the UK to civilians in respect of *(a)* civil emergencies and *(b)* exchange and familiarisation of personnel. [74641]

Mr. Ingram: There is no formal arrangement for United States Visiting Forces (USVF) to assist United Kingdom civil authorities in respect of civil emergencies or for the exchange and familiarisation of personnel. The USVF do however respond positively to specific requests for assistance by United Kingdom civil authorities, in particular in respect of search and rescue operations.

Nuclear Testing (Kiribati)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance his Department has given in the last five years resulting from British nuclear testing in Kiribati. [73970]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence arranged and took part in a specialist Reconnaissance Survey on Kiritimati during September 1998 to identify the types and quantities of waste materials, including an assessment of environmental risks, arising from the island's use as a base for the United Kingdom's nuclear test programme in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

A further visit was made to Kiritimati in August 2000 by MOD and independent specialists to gather further detailed information for the proposed clean-up project.

The clean-up of the waste material is to be undertaken by Contractors appointed and managed by specialists in the MOD. Preparatory work is currently underway with the actual clean-up work on site expected to start in 2003.

Wind Energy Technology

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the impact of his Department's policy on radar coverage and low flying upon the Government's policy to expand wind energy technology; and if he will make a statement. [73789]

Dr. Moonie: Ministry of Defence officials are currently involved in a steering group with the Department of Trade and Industry, Civil Aviation Authority, National Air Traffic Services and the British Wind Energy Association. The group aims to address some of the issues that lead to the MOD and others making objections to developers' proposals. The MOD is currently assisting in a DTI-sponsored project by QinetiQ to study the effects of turbines on radar.

The MOD is acutely aware of the government's stated aim to achieve 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom's energy from green sources by 2010 and makes every effort to assist in achieving this. However, the Government is also committed to maintaining flight safety and the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many proposed windfarms have been objected to by his Department in the last two years; and if he will list them. [73342]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1 January 2000, the Ministry of Defence has objected to a total of 284 wind energy proposals, but has had no objection to over 400.

I will write separately with the list and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he objects to windfarms only if they interfere with the operation of RAF aircraft; and whether other nations are consulted prior to entering an objection to a windfarm. [73343]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence deal with every wind energy proposal individually and all are given a full and thorough appraisal by at least seven separate Technical Advisors each with their own specialism including Radar, Low Flying, Communication Links and Met Office Radar. Other nations are not involved in the process of windfarm appraisal.

Nuclear Energy

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about his Department's plans for use and development of nuclear energy facilities; and if he will make a statement. [73788]

Dr. Moonie: Plutonium is the only fissile material produced in reactors. In April 1995 the then Foreign Secretary announced that the United Kingdom had ceased the production of fissile material for explosive purposes. Ministry of Defence has sufficient stocks of plutonium (as announced in SDR) to meet foreseeable needs. The UK supports the need for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty which would ban the production of fissile material for explosive purposes. Chapelcross MAGNOX reactors currently produce tritium for the national nuclear deterrent. BNFL has announced its decision to close Chapelcross by March 2005. Sufficient stocks of tritium are held to meet the needs of the Trident programme. Any decision on a replacement source of tritium, should one be required, will not need to be taken for many years.

War Disablement Pensions

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people in receipt of war disablement pensions were *(a)* receiving income support, *(b)* over retirement age and *(c)* in full-time employment in each of the last five years. [73969]

Dr. Moonie: The Veterans Agency administers the war pensions scheme. It does not retain statistical information relating to receipt of other benefits such as income support, or to the employment status of war disablement pensioners.

The following information is available in relation to those in receipt of war disablement pension (WDP):

At 31/3/1998: 259,160 WDP in payment—187,241 aged 65 or over

At 31/3/1999: 249,344 WDP in payment—179,868 aged 65 or over

At 31/3/2000: 239,423 WDP in payment—172,030 aged 65 or over

At 31/3/2001: 222,534 WDP in payment—158,971 aged 65 or over (men)

9,088 WDP in payment—6,872 aged 60 or over (women)

At 31/3/2002: 213,353 WDP in payment—151,527 aged 65 or over (men)

8,893 WDP in payment—6,585 aged 60 or over (women)

Prior to April 2000, data for war disablement pensions paid to men and women over retirement age was not recorded separately.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason his Department is not represented at the Saville Inquiry. [74476]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is not a party to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry because the MOD of today has neither a case to put nor a position to defend.

The MOD has been represented by Counsel when invited to do so by the Tribunal to give assistance on specific matters. In addition, officials from the MOD have maintained a near-permanent presence at the hearings.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) who was responsible for the storage of photographs held by the Army legal team at the Widgery Inquiry; in what conditions and where these photographs were stored; when they will be produced for the Saville Inquiry; and what further photographs of Bloody Sunday are available; [74473]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* cinematic, *(b)* heli-telly and *(c)* other moving image photographic film clips of events on Bloody Sunday (i) available at the time of the Widgery Inquiry and (ii) discovered since; in what conditions and where these photographs were stored; who was responsible for their safekeeping; and which of these items have been (A) produced for the Saville Inquiry, (B) lost and (C) destroyed. [74474]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has provided the Bloody Sunday Inquiry with written statements on the subjects of photographs and film, and an official of this Department will give evidence to the Inquiry in the near future.

It would therefore be inappropriate to comment separately on these matters, and I am withholding the information requested in accordance with Exemption 4 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what cost has been incurred by the legal representation of Soldier "L" at the Saville Inquiry. [74475]

Mr. Ingram: Up to 9 September 2002 the Ministry of Defence has incurred costs of £346,977.30 for the legal representation of Soldier "L" at the Saville Inquiry.

Colombia

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* service personnel broken down by regiment and *(b)* other members of his staff have visited Colombia; what the purpose was of each visit; and what assistance he has provided the Colombian Government in the last 12 months. [74179]

Mr. Ingram: We do from time to time send military liaison teams to Colombia to provide advice and training assistance. The nature of this advice and assistance is confidential between governments and I am withholding the details under Exemption 1 of the code of practice on Access to Government Information, which covers information whose disclosure would be harmful to national security, defence or international relations.

Alcohol and Tobacco

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the rules are governing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco *(a)* on military premises, *(b)* in administration areas and *(c)* on operational duties. [74164]

Mr. Ingram: Service policies are based on education and personal responsibility for alcohol consumption and smoking.

Queen's Regulations, administrative instructions and policy guidance lay down general principles for the control and consumption of alcohol. Commanding officers are required to ensure that they have clear and effective local orders concerning alcohol and that these are enforced. These cover messes, bars, clubs and single living accommodation. Particular attention is given to the law relating to young people and the legal age for consuming alcohol. Specific single-Service directions are issued concerning fitness for duty, especially for safety critical posts and other designated tasks such as flying, driving and the carrying of arms.

Instructions and guidance on tobacco consumption mainly relate to health and safety, including restrictions on smoking in the workplace and in messes and accommodation areas and of course in the vicinity of military equipment and flammable substances.

Corporal John Gregory and Sergeant Robert Busuttil

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he has made for an investigation into the circumstances of the deaths of Corporal John Gregory and Sergeant Robert Busuttil. [74163]

Dr. Moonie: An investigation into the deaths of Corporal John Gregory and Sergeant Robert Busuttil was instigated immediately after the incident. Initial reports were compiled by the Kabul Detachment of the Royal Military Police and the 32nd Section of the Royal Military Police (United Kingdom) Special Investigation Branch. The investigation is not yet complete and remains ongoing at this time.

HMS Nottingham

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a replacement ship has been sent to cover the mission of HMS Nottingham. [73703]

Mr. Ingram: A direct replacement ship will not be sent to cover the remaining parts of Nottingham's programme.

As I stated in my answer of 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 759W, to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) HMS Nottingham deployed for duties associated with the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) including Exercise STARDEX. She was subsequently assigned to Coalition Maritime Operations in the Middle East, and was being held at notice for this purpose while deployed to the A[illegible] Pacific region. HMS York has been nominated a[illegible]e ship held at readiness in support of the fight aga[illegible]rrorism.

RFA Diligence has been offered to take part in Exercise STARDEX, as an indication of United Kingdom's continued support to FPDA.

Nuclear Weapons

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of procuring Trident missiles from the United States has been in each year since the procurement contract was initiated. [73558]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of procuring the Trident II (unarmed) missiles from the US under the Polaris Sales Agreement (as amended for Trident) has been as follows:

Financial Year	*Amount £M*
1980–81	0.023
1981–82	4.012
1982–83	8.471
1983–84	2.164
1984–85	2.009
1985–86	2.015
1986–87	0.308
1987–88	5.083
1988–89	7.368
1989–90	16.885
1990–91	28.800
1991–92	71.936
1992–93	108.132
1993–94	279.714
1994–95	188.299
1995–96	68.781
1996–97	48.140
1997–98	86.647
1998–99	79.264
1999–2000	71.524
2000–2001	53.223

Notes:
1. The final figure for 2001–2002 is not yet available.
2. Figures given are gross payments and do not take account of the credits due to the UK under the 1998 MOU to reduce the overall missile buy in accordance with SDR. These affect 2000–2001 onwards.
3. The costs cover only production costs as the UK paid no development costs for the missiles.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr Tonge) of 8 July, *Official Report*, column 714W, on nuclear missile defence, whether the collaborative research and information exchange will involve nuclear-based technology. [73699]

Mr. Hoon: There are no plans for this work to involve nuclear-based technologies.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost of deploying British personnel in the United States as a result of *(a)* the United Kingdom purchase of nuclear weapons from the United States, *(b)* the United Kingdom testing of nuclear weapons in the United States and *(c)* other logistical requirements, including C3 expertise, of procuring nuclear weapons from the United States has been since 1972. [73559]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom does not purchase nuclear weapons from the United States. Article 1 of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons forbids all nuclear weapon states from supplying nuclear weapons to any other state.

The remainder of the information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under which budget headings the projected expenditure on *(a)* the Trident programme, *(b)* Nuclear Warhead Stability Review, *(c)* nuclear waste disposal, *(d)* nuclear site security and *(e)* remediation of radioactively contaminated land and buildings on defence nuclear sites, as listed in tables 1 to 6 of CM 5412, Ministry of Defence Expenditure Plans 2002–04, published on 9 July, will be placed. [73569]

Mr. Ingram: Projected expenditure on items *(a)*–*(e)* falls under "Provision of Defence Capability" for the Ministry of Defence Resource Budget (of which part is counted against the MOD's Departmental Expenditure Limit and part against non-cash items in Annually Managed Expenditure). Projected expenditure on items *(a)*, *(c)*, *(d)* and *(e)* also falls under "Provision of Defence Capability" for the MOD Capital Budget.

The majority of this projected expenditure (both Resource and Capital) falls within three of our Top Level Budgets; Commander-in-Chief Fleet, Chief of Defence Logistics and Defence Procurement Agency. However additional projected Resource expenditure also falls within Land Command, RAF Strike Command and the Central Top Level Budget for item *(d)*.

A wide range of assets is also employed in support of these activities, covering most of the categories in Table 4.

Equipment (Heat and Desert Conditions)

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the performance of the Challenger I tank in extreme heat and desert conditions. [74647]

Mr. Ingram: The Challenger 1 Main Battle Tank is no longer in service and has been replaced by Challenger 2.

Challenger 2 was deployed on Exercise Saif Sareea II, held in Oman last year, where it was operated in extremely hot, dry, desert conditions. Post-exercise reports confirm that the tank performed very well during the Exercise, notwithstanding the higher than anticipated usage of engine air filters. Trials of possible enhancements to reduce the effects of high concentrations of dust on the tank are currently taking place.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent progress has been made to address the problems with *(a)* the Challenger 2, *(b)* AS90 and *(c)* suitability of personal equipment highlighted by the Saif Sareea II exercise. [74414]

Mr. Ingram: Trials of possible enhancements to reduce the effects of high concentrations of dust on the Challenger 2 are currently taking place.

To enhance the AS90's ability to operate more effectively in desert conditions, a Desertisation Upgrade Pack is being scoped with the Design Authority.

Personnel working on Exercise Saif Sareea II preparations over the summer months were issued with desert combat boots. It was considered that regular combat boots would be appropriate, given the expected temperatures, for the main exercise phase during the autumn. Temperatures were, however, significantly higher and a useful lesson learnt has been that for future deployments, in such temperatures, it would be appropriate for all troops to be issued with desert combat boots.

Both desert and temperate camouflaged uniforms were approved for use on Exercise Saif Sareea II. Following experience in Oman and Afghanistan, we intend to determine the optimum upper temperature range for the temperate uniform.

SA80

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the SA80 rifle; and whether it will continue in service. [74083]

Mr. Ingram: The SA80 modification programme has significantly improved the reliability and performance of the weapon. Extensive trials were carried out in severe climatic conditions including the desert, the arctic and the jungle; these trials confirmed the newly modified weapon's superior capabilities. More recent trials and demonstrations in Afghanistan and Oman have established beyond doubt that the weapon is highly accurate, reliable, and that it can be effectively maintained in an operational environment.

The modified weapon, the SA80 A2, is being deployed over the period December 2001 to May 2006 and is due to remain in service until 2020.

Training Exercises

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans a further exercise on the scale of Saif Sareea II; and what recent exercises have taken place in different *(a)* geographical and *(b)* environmental conditions. [74415]

Mr. Ingram: We aim to hold periodic exercises on the scale of Saif Sareea II but planning for the next one is still at a very early stage. Exercises at all levels frequently take place in different geographical and environmental conditions to prepare our armed forces for the many different challenges they may face, some long planned and some at short notice. A list of the most recent exercises could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Information is only held centrally on major exercises listed in the Ministry of Defence's Defence Exercise Programme (DXP) which covers some 350 exercises each year. Examples from the DXP of recent exercises in different geographical and environmental conditions include:

Exercise name	*Date*	*Location*	*Type*
PANTHER CUB	Feb 02	Belize	Land Command jungle warfare training
STRONG RESOLVE	Mar 02	Norway/Poland	Tri-Service participation in quadrennial NATO LIVEX
RED FLAG	Mar 02	USA	HQ Strike Command air exercise in USA
GRAND PRIX	Mar 02	Kenya	Land Command battlegroup exercise
JOINT VENTURE	May 02	UK	PJHQ tri-Service Component Commander Command Post Exercise
STARDEX 02	Jul 02	Malaysia	FLEET exercise within Five Power Defence Agreement

MOX

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications his Department has had with the Belgian Government since March 2001 in respect of the manufacture of lead test MOX assemblies for the United States Department of Energy. [73554]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Common European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the Common European Security and Defence policy. [73836]

Mr. Hoon: The European Security and Defence Policy seeks to strengthen Europe's military capabilities and to support the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, while enabling a better and more coherent European contribution to NATO. It gives the EU the ability to take military decisions, and to take control of crisis management operations where NATO as a whole is not engaged.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the threat posed to Britain by weapons of mass destruction. [73904]

Mr. Hoon: We remain concerned about the threat from weapons of mass destruction to the United Kingdom and to UK interests. We continue to monitor developments closely. The Government's dossier on the threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was published on 24 September.

Although we assess that terrorists are more likely to mount conventional attacks, as long as Al Qaeda views the United Kingdom as a target, we cannot rule out the risk of a terrorist attack using chemical, biological or nuclear materials on the UK or its interests.

Army Training Estate

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the civilian recreational groups which have had access to the Army Training Estate, Salisbury Plain, since January; and if he will make a statement. [72611]

Dr. Moonie: Since January this year, the following civilian recreational groups and organisations have had access to the Army Training Estate Salisbury Plain:

Name of Group/Organisation	*Activity*
All Wheel Drive Club	Promotional Day/Safari
Avon Vale Hunt	Hunt
Avon & Wiltshire Shooting Club	Shooting
Barleycroft Shoot	Shooting
British Model Flying Association	Model Aircraft Flying
British Deer Society	Services Branch—Deer Management
Castle Down School	Cross Country Runs

Name of Group/Organisation	*Activity*
English Heritage	Ancient Monument survey/ maintenance
Mr. Flower	Seed Collection
Flying Druids Model Aircraft Club	Model Aircraft Flying
Frome & District Pistol Club	Shooting
Game Conservancy Trust	Partridge Survey
Manor Farm Leisure	Carriage Drive
Muzzle Loaders	Rifle Range practice
North Wiltshire Rifle & Pistol Club	Shooting
Palmer & Milburn Beagles	Beagling
Various Civilian Clubs	Point to Point
Royal Society Preservation of Birds	Bird count/watch
SMG TV Productions	Filming
SPC Promotions	Mountain bike event
Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen Families Association	Car Boot Sale
Salisbury & District Gun Club	Shooting
Salisbury Vintage Rifle & Pistol Club	Shooting
Salisbury Plain Falconry Club	Raptor fighting
Salisbury Plain Area Mountain Bikers	Mountain Bike event
Sarum Orienteering	Orienteering
Services Dry Fly Fishing Association	Fishing/river bank maintenance
Southern Countries Off Road	4 × 4 Safari
Southern England Trail Riders Association	Enduro
Southern Pointer Club	Dog Show
Tidworth Hunt	Hunt
The Crown at Everleigh	Car Parking
The Troop	Boer War Reconstruction
Warminster Running Club	Imber Half Marathon
Wessex Rifle Club	Shooting
Wiltshire & Infantry Beagles	Vermin Control
Wiltshire Archaeological Trust	Guided tour of ancient monuments
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust	Sarsen Trail & Neolithic Marathon

Veterans

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many veterans of the armed services have made applications for skilled nursing care; and how many of these have been successful in the last five years; [74252]

(2) how many veterans of the second world war have had nursing care paid by the War Pensions Agency in the last five years. [74253]

Dr. Moonie: The Veterans Agency administers the War Pensions Scheme, including discretionary payments for skilled nursing care where this is required due to disablement for which a war pension has been awarded.

The following information shows the number of applications for skilled nursing care payments made by war disablement pensioners in the last five financial years and the number of these that were successful:

Year	*Applications*	*Successful*
1997–1998	197	104
1998–1999	132	52
1999–2000	85	23
2000–2001	34	1
2001–2002	51	15
Total	499	195

Separate records are not held for Second World War veterans in relation to skilled nursing care.

Food Supplies

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the total food purchased for the armed forces in the last 12 months was purchased overseas. [73804]

Mr. Ingram: In the last 12 months, approximately 28 per cent. of the food supplied to the armed forces by the Ministry of Defence's food supply contractor, "3663," was purchased overseas. This figure includes foods that are not produced in this country and others that have to be purchased overseas for Service personnel serving abroad, due to export or customs restrictions. Of the food purchased for use in Operational Ration Packs only 14 per cent. is purchased overseas.

Annington Homes

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many dwellings in the Taunton constituency were sold to Annington Homes; when the sale took place; how many dwellings are available for married soldiers; how many have been demolished; and how many have been sold. [74090]

Dr. Moonie: 139 out of a total of 140 Ministry of Defence properties in the constituency of Taunton were sold to Annington Homes Limited (AHL), as part of the sale and leaseback of Service Families' Accommodation in November 1996. 41 of these properties have since become surplus to requirements and been handed back to AHL. 99 properties are currently available for Service families. MOD has not arranged the demolition of any properties in Taunton. The future of properties released to AHL is a matter for that company.

Defence Equipment (Israel)

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* categories and *(b)* quantities of defence equipment have been purchased from Israel since 8 November 2001; and if he will make a statement. [74250]

Dr. Moonie: Since 8 November 2001, a total of three contracts have been placed with prime contractors based in Israel as follows:

Category of Equipment	*Quantity*
Simon Rounds	20
Light Machine Guns	7
Assembly of Aircrew Equipment Assemblies	3

Sapper Alfred Graham Manship

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigation was held into the death of Sapper Alfred Graham Manship of 26 Amphibious Regiment Royal Engineers in 1992 in Osnabruck, West Germany; how long the investigation took; when the investigation ended; who conducted the investigation; what the conclusion of the investigation was; and if he will make a statement. [73822]

Dr. Moonie: The Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police (SIB RMP) was responsible for investigating the death of Sapper Manship in Osnabruck, Germany, in 1992. The investigation began when the SIB RMP was informed of Sapper Manship's death in the early hours of Monday 6 April 1992 and was completed on 16 April 1992. The investigation was led by an experienced SIB RMP investigator of the rank of Staff Sergeant and, as for all SIB RMP inquiries, was overseen by the Officer Commanding the SIB RMP Detachment. The investigation concluded that there was no evidence to indicate foul play and that Sapper Manship had taken his own life.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the period of time was between the discovery of the body of Sapper Alfred Graham Manship of 26 Amphibious Regiment Royal Engineers in 1992 in Osnabruck, West Germany and *(a)* a doctor being called to attend the scene and *(b)* a doctor arriving on the scene; and if he will make a statement. [73820]

Dr. Moonie: Sapper Manship's body was discovered by another soldier at approximately 0237hrs on 6 April 1992. The emergency services were summoned and a doctor attended the scene at around 0255hrs. Sapper Manship was declared dead at the scene at 0258hrs.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the weapon of Sapper Alfred Graham Manship of 26 Amphibious Regiment Royal Engineers was found to have been fired when examined after his death in 1992 in Osnabruck, West Germany; and if he will make a statement. [73821]

Dr. Moonie: Following the certification of death of Sapper (Spr) Manship, his weapon was recovered from the scene and handed to the Class 1 Armourer at 25 Regiment Royal Engineers for examination. The practice of submitting weapons subject to investigation to qualified personnel outside the unit in whose charge they are is standard for Royal Military Police (RMP) investigations.

In the statement recorded from the Armourer, he opined that the weapon was found to be serviceable and no faults could be discovered in its mechanical function. The Armourer did not make any specific reference to whether the weapon had been fired.

RMP enquiries established that Spr Manship had been issued with an SA80 Assault Rifle, plus 30 rounds of ammunition for his guard duty. The batch number of the spent ammunition recovered from the scene was found to be that of the ammunition issued to Spr Manship. In view of this, the location of the wound site, and all other enquiries conducted, the RMP investigating officer concluded that the submission of the weapon or spent ammunition to scientific analysis would not achieve any investigative purpose and would serve only to delay the release of Spr Manship's body to his family.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the *(a)* cause, *(b)* circumstances and *(c)* coroner's verdict on the death of Sapper Alfred Graham Manship of the 26 Amphibious Regiment Royal Engineers in 1992 in Osnabruck West Germany. [73881]

Dr. Moonie: Sapper Manship died on 6 April 1992 from a single gunshot wound to the head whilst on guard duty at Woolwich Barracks, Osnabruck, Germany. Following the subsequent Post Mortem Examination, Sapper Manship's body was repatriated to Scotland from Germany and the Procurator Fiscal was informed of the death. Under the legislation which allows for the holding of a Fatal Accident Inquiry, the Procurator Fiscal will only hold such an inquiry where the death occurred in Scotland or on an offshore installation, aircraft or ship. Since the death did not occur within Scotland, the Procurator Fiscal did not hold an inquiry in this case; this decision was not within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the result was of the post mortem conducted on Sapper Alfred Graham Manship of 26 Amphibious Regiment Royal Engineers after his death in 1992 in Osnabruck West Germany; and if he will make a statement. [73880]

Dr. Moonie: The Post Mortem Examination was conducted by the Consultant Pathologist at the British Military Hospital at Rinteln. On the death certificate, dated 6 April 1992, the cause of death was recorded as Gunshot Head Injuries.

European Integration Conference

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the First Conference of EU Military Schools and Academies on the theme of the military dimension of European integration, held at Coëtquidan. [73863]

Mr Hoon: The European Military Academies Conference on the theme of "European Integration—The Military Dimension" was held at the French Military Academy, St Cyr in July of this year. The conference was sponsored by the European Commission. The conference addressed a number of topics related to European Defence, such as possible crisis management scenarios and defence industry cooperation. There was no direct involvement by HM Government or the Ministry of Defence in its organisation.

The Conference was attended by delegates from many European nations including a number of officer cadets and staff from the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.

RAF Chilmark

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to date of ordnance clearance at RAF Chilmark; and when the site will be put on the market. [72613]

Dr. Moonie: The cost over the first five years since the closure of the site of clearing explosive ordnance has been in the region of £1.7 million. A further £371,000 has been spent on preparation of Land Quality Assessments and remediation.

RAF Chilmark is currently being prepared for disposal. It is anticipated that the sale of the freehold will take place during 2003 when clearance is complete.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in constituting a trust to manage RAF Chilmark; and if he will make a statement. [72614]

Dr. Moonie: The constitution of a Trust for that part of the former RAF Chilmark which has wildlife and conservation interest is a matter for the interested parties. The Ministry of Defence will not be part of the Trust. Defence Estates is currently in discussion with representatives of the potential Trustees and is waiting to receive their firm proposals for the purchase and management of the site.

Anti-tank Missile Loss (Bristol Channel)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the pallet of an anti-tank missile lost in the Bristol Channel recently has been found. [73313]

Dr. Moonie: No. Searches of the area have been carried out by the Avon and Somerset Constabulary, the Coastguard, the RAF and, more recently, Royal Navy divers. However, the pallet has not been found.

Ammunition

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what type of ammunition has been imported to the UK for the use of the army, and at what cost, over the last 12 months. [73314]

Dr. Moonie: In the 12 months up to 26 July 2002, the following types of ammunition have been imported to the United Kingdom for the use of the military:

7.62mm BALL, 21mm ROCKET SYSTEM, 21mm TRAINING SYSTEM, 0.5 4B/IT, .338 LAPUA, 12.7mm 4MP, 12.7mm 1MP, 5.56mm AP, 9mm MARKER, 66mm, GOALKEEPER MPDS, GOALKEEPER FMPDS, 9mm, 66mm, .338m" and 14.5mm Artillery Training L21A1 (Charge 2).

I am withholding information regarding the cost of importing this ammunition in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Northern Ireland

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what orders were issued and special arrangements made concerning conduct of service personnel from the Royal Irish Regiment during the marching season in 2002; how many soldiers were subject to disciplinary proceedings that related to inappropriate political activity during this period; and what the outcome was of proceedings. [74162]

Mr. Ingram: Each year all service personnel serving in Northern Ireland, including members of the Royal Irish Regiment, are reminded in unit orders of the Army's policy regarding participation in political activities and demonstrations. Three soldiers were investigated by the Royal Military Police for possible breach of this policy. At present there is one soldier subject to proceedings.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the procedure is in Northern Ireland for the investigation of a suspicious death or one from non-natural causes on military premises. [74167]

Mr. Ingram: The Police Service of Northern Ireland retain jurisdiction for the investigation of all suspicious deaths that may occur on military premises within Northern Ireland. This is the same procedure and jurisdiction that applies throughout the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the reasons were that underlie his decision to erect a new surveillance tower at Slievebracken Mount, Forkhill in July; what consultation he carried out with locally elected representatives and community organisations; and what the estimated cost is of this construction. [74168]

Mr. Ingram: I believe that the structure you refer to is the temporary water tower on Slievebracken Mountain, Forkhill. It was not a surveillance tower. The Ministry of Defence has crown immunity with regard to planning permission and there was no consultation carried out with locally elected representatives or community organisations. As military personnel carried out the work on this temporary structure there were no costs involved other than those for the construction materials, the cost of irrecoverable items being estimated at some £3,500.

The temporary structure has now been removed.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many baton log reports were filed in each month of the last two years; what information fields are to be filled in by each person involved in the compilation of a report leading up the chain of command to HQNI; which of those fields must be completed and which are optional; and if he will make a statement on the processes involved in the entry of data from baton log reports to *(a)* a centralised database and *(b)* other systems. [74166]

Mr. Ingram: The number of baton log reports files in each month over the last two years are set out in the table below:

	2000	*2001*	*2002*
January		0	0
February		*2*	0
March		0	0
April		0	*3*
May		0	*11*
June		0	*17*
July		*1*	*34*
August		0	*18*
September		*3*	*2*

	2000	2001	2002
October	0	1	
November	0	9	
December	0	1	
Total	0	17	85

All fields of the baton log report are completed by the person ordering the firing of the baton round before it is forwarded to HQNI. The information from the baton log is scrutinised by the chain of command in HQNI and is stored in hard copy form as well as on a database.

Mobile Phones

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the rules are governing the carriage and use of personal mobile phones by service personnel of all ranks on operational duties at home and overseas; and what sanctions are available to superior officers to enforce those rules. [74165]

Mr. Ingram: There are no specific rules that govern the carriage of personal mobile phones by members of the Armed Forces on operational duties; and the use of personal mobile phones during deployments and operations is at the discretion of the local Commander. Joint Service Publication 440 details the regulations concerning the security classification of information that can be discussed on mobile phones. It also authorises commanders to prohibit the use of mobile phones on Ministry of Defence sites and in locations denoted as "Hazardous Areas" or in areas containing classified communications equipment. Additionally, although there are no specific sanctions for the misuse of mobile phones, commanders may restrict their use in a geographic location or for a specific period of time for operational reasons. The mechanism for enforcing this is through Theatre Standing Orders. Service personnel who fail to comply with published Standing Orders or with a lawful command would be subject to disciplinary action under normal disciplinary procedures, enforceable through Queen's Regulations.

Beryllium

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department had with the Department for Trade and Industry regarding the decision to license the export of beryllium to *(a)* India and *(b)* Iran in 2001. [74696]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has regular discussions with the Department of Trade and Industry on all relevant aspects of export licensing. Disclosure of internal opinions, advice, recommendation and consultation on individual export licence issues could harm the frankness and candour of internal discussions. I am, therefore, withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 2 (Internal Discussions and advice) of Part II of the Government's Code of Practice on Access to Government information.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 11 September 2001 from the hon. Member for Torbay regarding foot and mouth. [58922]

Mr. Morley: I responded to the hon. Member on 7 October.

Recycling

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her latest estimate is of recycling rates of waste *(a)* paper, *(b)* glass, *(c)* metal, *(d)* wood and *(e)* cloth for each London borough; what the Government targets are in each case; and if she will make a statement. [71108]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Recycling data are collected in the Department's annual Municipal Waste Management Survey 2000–01. The total tonnages collected for recycling for different materials are listed below for all London boroughs and the four London Waste Disposal Authorities. Recycling rates are not available for individual materials. Separate recycling tonnages are not available for wood.

The Government's Waste Strategy 2000 established national targets of recycling or composting at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005, 30 per cent. by 2010 and 33 per cent. by 2015. These targets are not material specific.

To underpin the national targets, we have set challenging statutory performance standards for recycling or composting household waste for each local authority in England. Authorities must, on average, double their 1998–99 recycling rate by 2003–04 and triple their 1998–99 rate by 2005–06.

The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended) set annual recovery and material-specific recycling targets for certain businesses. The material-specific recycling target of 19 per cent. set for 2002 covers paper, glass and aluminium.

tonnes

Authority	*Paper and card*	*Glass*	*Cans, scrap metal and white goods*	*Textiles*
Unitary Authorities				
Bexley	10,719	1,447	1,799	48
Bromley	16,512	3,043	2,436	508
Croydon	6,645	2,397	4,518	399
Greenwich	2,250	786	2,209	69
Kingston-upon-Thames	5,534	958	2,023	134
Lewisham	3,836	1,260	67	48
London Corporation	3	7	0	0
Merton	7,052	1,284	1,096	245
Southwark	1,808	1,054	126	104
Sutton	4,686	2,114	685	192
Tower Hamlets	1,132	711	123	82
Westminster City	4,181	2,052	37	118

tonnes

Authority	Paper and card	Glass	Cans, scrap metal and white goods	Textiles
Waste Collection Authorities				
Barking and Dagenham	1,232	375	260	257
Barnet	8,128	1,655	106	235
Brent	4,652	1,747	268	419
Camden	9,980	3,303	982	604
Ealing	7,310	3,511	811	271
Enfield	4,182	1,481	1,164	189
Hackney	485	545	13	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,908	1,280	75	72
Haringey	3,774	894	591	40
Harrow	6,484	1,639	1,033	172
Havering	883	1,163	429	244
Hillingdon	3,882	1,652	3,976	317
Hounslow	6,671	2,693	2,288	296
Islington	2,761	1,494	74	20
Lambeth	5,380	3,202	714	189
Kensington and Chelsea	7,383	1,265	203	1
Newham	1,305	428	465	75
Redbridge	4,179	872	585	171
Richmond upon Thames	8,111	2,945	1,284	320
Waltham Forest	3,127	1,222	743	184
Wandsworth	4,663	2,193	193	17
Waste Disposal Authorities				
East London Waste Authority	0	0	0	0
North London Waste Authority	0	0	0	0
West London Waste Authority	0	0	1,460	0
Western Riverside Waste Authority	511	165	434	3
Grand Total	*163,349*	*52,837*	*33,270*	*6,043*

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what figures she collates on the recycling rates for *(a)* car batteries, *(b)* alkaline batteries, *(c)* computers and *(d)* mobile phones in each London borough; what the figures were in each of the past five years; and what plans she has to increase recycling rates. [71109]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* Recycling data are collected in the Department's Municipal Waste Management Survey 2000–01. The total tonnages collected for recycling for batteries are listed below for all London boroughs and the four London Waste Disposal Authorities. Recycling rates are not available for individual materials. Recycling tonnages are not available for computers or mobile phones.

All local authorities have been set challenging individual statutory performance standards for recycling and composting. These can be found in the Government's *Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies*, published in March 2001. Copies are available in the House of Commons Library and from the DEFRA website:

http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/management/guidance/mwms/index.htm

Tonnages of batteries collected for recycling 2000–01

tonnes

Unitary Authorities	
Bexley	46
Bromley	105
City of Westminster	0
Corporation of London	0
Croydon	0
Greenwich	34
Kingston-upon-Thames	55
Lewisham	0
Merton	0
Southwark	4
Sutton	4
Tower Hamlets	0
Waste Collection Authorities	
Barking and Dagenham	0
Barnet	0
Brent	0
Camden	20
Ealing	43
Enfield	42
Hackney	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0
Haringey	0
Harrow	41
Havering	61
Hillingdon	0
Hounslow	17
Islington	0
Kensington and Chelsea	0
Lambeth	10
Newham	23
Redbridge	312
Richmond upon Thames	0
Waltham Forest	37
Wandsworth	0
Waste Disposal Authorities	
Western Riverside Waste Authority	20
East London Waste Authority	0
North London Waste Authority	0
West London Waste Authority	0

Moorings (London)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what forecasts have been made by British Waterways of the *(a)* number, *(b)* cost and *(c)* distribution of residential and non-residential moorings in London as a consequence of their review of licence and permit conditions. [70146]

Alun Michael: None. British Waterways' review of licence and permit conditions relates solely to vessel dimensions, the terms under which vessels may use the waterways and, where applicable, the terms and conditions of mooring.

I understand that my hon. Friend met British Waterways on 13 September to discuss these issues.

Sellafield

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what costs were incurred in *(a)* historic and *(b)* current prices in carrying out the monitoring of nuclear waste discharges to the Irish Sea from the Windscale plant. [69632]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 July 2002]:* Monitoring of discharges is mainly the responsibility of the operator and so the majority of the costs of monitoring discharges from Windscale (which has been known as Sellafield since the early 1980s) would have fallen to BNFL and its predecessors. No information is held by the Department or by the Environment Agency about the costs of monitoring by operators.

Packaging Waste

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what her estimate is of the changes in packaging quantities on *(a)* food and *(b)* non-food goods on retail sale over the past five years; what proportion of this is recyclable; and if she will make a statement; [71113]

(2) what plans she has to reduce packaging on retail sales; and if she will make a statement. [70941]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended) include incentives for businesses to minimise the amount of packaging they use and actively encourage the reuse of packaging. Packaging which is being reused carries no obligation after its first obligated trip. By increasing the amount of packaging reused, producers are therefore able to reduce their costs of compliance. By placing a tonnage obligation on producers, the Regulations also encourage them to reduce the amount of packaging used.

In addition, the Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations 1997 include a requirement that packaging must be minimal subject to the safety and hygiene of the packed product to the consumer. The Regulations are enforced by local Trading Standards Officers, *and two examples of prosecution under these regulations are known to the Department.*

We have no detailed information on the quantity of packaging used in food and non-food goods on retail sale.

Producer Responsibility

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what her policy is regarding producer responsibility of WEEE for the EU conciliation process; [72039]

(2) how she intends to define producer responsibility for the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive to make it compatible with the producer pays principle; [72037]

(3) if she will make a statement on her policy regarding the principle of individual producer responsibility; [72035]

(4) what steps she is taking to secure well-defined individual producer responsibility for electronic waste. [72036]

Mr. Meacher: The Government welcomes the proposed EC Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment. The Department works closely with all Departments, in particular with the DTI, who lead in negotiations, on this Directive. The Directive is still under negotiation and without a final text it is too early to provide details of how it will be implemented in the UK.

The Government supports the principle of individual producer responsibility, though we believe collective responsibility should be kept open as an option where otherwise there could be disproportionate costs to SMEs. The Common position text allows a collective as well as an individual approach to producer responsibility, and both uphold the polluter pays principle.

EU Environmental Liability Directive

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made of the need for compulsory insurance as part of the EU Environmental Liability Directive regime to give polluters a greater incentive to avoid environmental damage. [72493]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The European Commission's draft Directive on Environmental Liability requires Member States to encourage the use by operators of any appropriate insurance or other forms of financial security.

Compulsory insurance is one possible means of financial security and was covered by the Government's public consultation which ended on 24 May 2002, and in the extended partial regulatory impact assessment (COM (02) 17). A mechanism such as this could support both the prevention and remediation aspects of the proposed Directive, with insurers offering policies on the basis of best environmental practice. It would also ensure that a source of funding was available for the remediation of damage, should it occur.

The insurance industry has made it clear that it does not welcome compulsory insurance, but does desire a directive that is clear and workable so that cover can be offered.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the inclusion of the compliance with permit and state of the art exemptions in the EU Environmental Liability Directive. [72494]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* No specific assessment has been undertaken of the inclusion of the permit and state of the art exceptions. The extended partial regulatory impact assessment submitted to Parliament (COM (02) 17) did consider the implications of removal of the permit exception, to inform the UK negotiating position in preparation for any moves by other Member States to remove it.

This assessment revealed that removal of the permit exception could have two conflicting effects: a damaging effect upon business certainty and the ability of operators to obtain financing, whilst secondly providing an incentive for operators to treat permit conditions as a minimum requirement, and therefore take further precaution in their activities to minimise their risks. By extension, inclusion of the exception could provide shareholders and operators with some confidence, but on the other hand reduce the precautionary effect.

The same considerations may be applied to the exception for compliance with state of the art.

Ragwort

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research her Department has evaluated regarding the spread of ragwort; and what action her Department has taken to *(a)* combat the spread of ragwort and *(b)* publicise knowledge of its spread. [74397]

Alun Michael: In 2001, the former MAFF commissioned an ADAS research project to review ragwort and its control with particular reference to horses. This included a study of the factors influencing the spread of ragwort, such as changes in land use, changes in agricultural policy and climate change. The study confirmed that these factors may influence the spread of ragwort. However, it concluded that there was insufficient scientific data to allow evaluation of the extent to which the prevalence of ragwort had increased as as result of them.

Defra investigates complaints about the spread of ragwort and other injurious weeds covered by the Weeds Act 1959 where there is a threat to farmed land or land used for the keeping of horses as part of a diversified farm businesses. When a complaint is received the occupier of the land will be asked to take action to clear the weeds. If this fails to resolve the problem, Defra has statutory powers under the Weeds Act to arrange for the weeds to be cleared and to recover the cost from the occupier of the land. In the majority of cases, complaints about ragwort are resolved through co-operation and persuasion, without the need to take legal action.

The spread of ragwort along the sides of roads and on railway land is of particular concern to many people in the countryside. I have recently written to the Highways Agency, Local Government Association and Railtrack reminding them of the serious problems that can be caused by ragwort and urging them to ensure that they take effective clearance action.

This year we have also revised guidance on the Weeds Act and two updated Defra leaflets are available. "The Weeds Act 1959—Preventing the spread of harmful weeds" gives general advice about the operation of the Weeds Act and "The Weeds Act 1959—Guidance note on the methods that can be used to control harmful weeds" provides technical advice on the control of ragwort and other injurious weeds. Both leaflets can be found on the Defra website and hard copies can be obtained from Defra publications.

Ouse Flooding

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that the consultation process which follows the publication of the Ouse draft flood strategy is one which allows all sections of the community to comment. [73950]

Mr. Morley: I am advised by the Environment Agency that the Ouse Strategy has undergone a consultation process during its production, with meetings occurring with Lewes Flood Action, Residents Associations and many other interest groups. A working group was established, with representations from the communities involved, including businesses, elected members, parish councillors, flood action groups and landowners.

The purpose was to obtain advice and comments as the strategy developed, and public meetings were held in Lewes and Uckfield to facilitate this. Smaller meetings were also held with a number of other parish and residents' groups through the valley to allow for comment from other sections of the community. In addition, letters received were passed to our consultants for consideration when developing the strategy.

The Ouse strategy now includes the Environment Agency's preferred options which are believed to represent the most economical, technical and environmentally sound proposals for the catchment. It is these options that will be forwarded to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) for consideration for grant aid.

Public meetings are being arranged by the Environment Agency in Lewes and Uckfield in August to explain the strategy, with further meetings to follow at parish level. There is still an opportunity to influence the strategy during the detailed design stage.

Subject to approval, the strategy will be reviewed on a five yearly basis to take account of climate change and other variables.

Sustainable Development

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what specific criteria her Department proposes for the where possible clause to become applicable within the pledge to replenish fish stocks agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [74615]

Mr. Morley: The United Kingdom attaches high importance to the commitment to restore fish stocks and will be seeking to secure this by 2015 under the Common Fisheries Policy. The wording "where possible" was inserted to meet the concerns of some parties that the objective might in some cases in other parts of the world be biologically impossible.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the Government plans to develop the partnership agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to increase the capacity of coastal developing countries to tackle and manage their fish resources; and by which year these partnerships will need to be fully operational to help achieve the 2015 millennium development goals. [74617]

Mr. Morley: A number of local, regional or thematic partnerships were announced at WSSD which are potentially relevant to helping coastal developing countries manage their fish resources. The United Kingdom will join these partnerships where we are invited to do so and it is clear that we have a contribution to make.

The UK has been invited to join the core planning group for the "White Water to Blue water" initiative, promoted by the United States and intended to promote

a cross-cutting approach to regional oceans and coastal ecosystem management in the Wider Caribbean region. Fisheries are within the scope of this work.

The UK is currently exploring how it might assist global work to protect coral reefs through the International Coral Reefs Initiative, and is supporting OSPAR (the convention for the protection of the marine environment of the North East Atlantic) in developing a partnership with the equivalent convention for West Africa. Both should contribute to helping developing countries manage fish stocks more effectively.

The Plan of Action agreed at WSSD called for action to strengthen donor coordination and partnerships to enable developing countries to develop their capacity for infrastructure and integrated management, and the sustainable use of fisheries. The UK will continue to work for this through its bilateral aid programme, through its membership of a number of regional fisheries organisations, and through partnerships with a number of UN agencies, in particular with the FAO.

While these partnerships will contribute to the elimination of poverty, they are not explicitly timed to coincide with the Millennium Development Goals.

Ecological Surveys

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what ecological surveys have been conducted by *(a)* English Nature and *(b)* his Department in respect of the sites identified for development as asylum accomodation centres to determine the presence of protected species; if the Government will publish the reports; and what further plans the Government have to commission such surveys. [74521]

Mr. Morley: I understand that there are Home Office proposals to build asylum seeker accommodation centres on surplus land at three sites; the Defence Storage and Distribution Centre near Bicester (Oxfordshire), RAF Newton (Nottinghamshire) and Throckmorton Airfield (near Pershore, Worcestershire).

It is not the Department's role, or English Nature's, to commission or undertake ecological surveys of potential development sites. As with any planning proposal, it will be for the relevant planning authority to ensure that potential impacts on protected species are identified and considered, including requiring the developer to undertake ecological surveys where appropriate.

English Nature's role is to provide advice to the planning authority and also to the developer on the nature conservation issues. With respect to the specific sites, English Nature reports that Wychavon District Council has commissioned an ecological survey of the Throckmorton site and also that English Nature staff have liaised with ecological consultants engaged on behalf of developers in respect of the Bicester site.

Where European protected species will be affected by an activity such as development works then my Department administers a licensing regime under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994. A licence under these Regulations may be needed to allow the development works or other activity to proceed. Ecological surveys of sites are required from applicants as part of applications for such licences, in order to allow the conservation issues to be fully considered. There is no Crown immunity from these Regulations. At this point in time no applications have been received by my Department in respect of these sites.

Emergency Disposal Sites

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has made to implement the recommendation of the Anderson Committee that the question of compensation for communities accommodating emergency disposal sites should be researched. [73433]

Mr. Morley: We will examine this recommendation as part of our work to prepare a response to the inquiries carried out by Dr. Anderson and Sir Brian Follett.

Farming

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what incentive schemes are in place to *(a)* encourage farmers to avoid over-production, *(b)* increase the sustainability of farmers, *(c)* to make alternative use of surplus agricultural land and *(d)* extend the programme of crop growing for energy production. [73557]

Mr. Morley: The Government is committed to moving rapidly towards a more sustainable, competitive and diverse farming industry. Key to this is reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), where we want to phase out market price support and production controls, reduce direct payments and decouple them from production. We are also seeking to shift towards the CAP's "second pillar", expanding the opportunities available for targeted support for rural development and agri-environment schemes. In this context, we welcome the proposals brought forward by the Commission as part of the CAP mid-term reviews.

In England, the schemes covered by the England Rural Development Programme play a significant role in delivering the Government's objectives for sustainable production and land management, including those listed in the question. These schemes are the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, the Organic Farming Scheme, the Hill Farm Allowance, the Woodland Grant Scheme, the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, the Rural Enterprise Scheme, the Vocational Training Scheme, the Processing and Marketing Grant and the Energy Crops Scheme. The budget for the Programme is £1.6 billion over the period 2000–2006. Similar schemes specific to Welsh needs operate within the Rural Development Plan for Wales, the total budget for which is £450 million over the same period.

In addition, there are incentives under some of the CAP subsidy regimes to limit production, for example through livestock extensification and some schemes under the "national envelopes".

The Government is working with stakeholders to develop and deliver a new strategy for sustainable farming and food in England, to be published in the autumn, which may include further measures of this

kind. The devolved administrations are pursuing their own strategies. For example, the strategy for agriculture in Wales, "Farming for the Future", prepared in association with industry and countryside interests, was published last November.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers have been declared bankrupt per month in each of the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [74188]

Alun Michael: Data are available for England and Wales only on a quarterly basis. The level of farm bankruptcies and insolvencies tends to be in the order of a few hundred a year (as at June 2002 there were approximately 210,000 main and minor agricultural holdings[1]). The annual number of total insolvencies in the last five years (1997–2001) was 240 which is nearly 40 per cent. lower than the average number in the previous 5 years (1992–1996). In 2001, the total number of insolvencies rose by 14 per cent. Quarter 1 figures are available for 2002 and show a 9 per cent. increase over the same period for 2001.

Table 1 Number of Quarterly Bankruptcies in the Agriculture and Horticulture Sector: England and Wales 1991–2002

Year	Quarter	Individual Bankruptcy Orders[2]	Company Insolvencies[3]	Total Insolvencies[4]
1991	Q1	68	32	100
	Q2	64	37	101
	Q3	53	27	80
	Q4	81	39	120
1992	Q1	89	38	127
	Q2	89	46	135
	Q3	62	57	119
	Q4	73	50	123
1993	Q1	86	41	127
	Q2	63	42	105
	Q3	63	27	90
	Q4	65	47	112
1994	Q1	60	63	123
	Q2	70	35	105
	Q3	43	35	78
	Q4	58	33	91
1995	Q1	80	40	120
	Q2	65	21	86
	Q3	36	17	53
	Q4	37	21	58
1996	Q1	45	23	68
	Q2	39	17	56
	Q3	54	27	81
	Q4	30	22	52
1997	Q1	42	13	55
	Q2	46	10	56
	Q3	37	17	54
	Q4	30	11	41
1998	Q1	42	14	56
	Q2	29	16	45
	Q3	39	23	62
	Q4	47	12	59
1999	Q1	54	22	76
	Q2	50	14	64
	Q3	45	16	61
	Q4	34	23	57
2000	Q1	53	18	71
	Q2	35	13	48
	Q3	52	10	62
	Q4	33	26	59
2001	Q1	44	22	66
	Q2	48	25	73
	Q3	44	20	64
	Q4	47	23	70
2002	Q1	42	30	72

Notes:
[1] Defra statistics
[2] Figures for individual insolvencies comprise bankruptcy orders and individual voluntary arrangements under the Insolvency Act 1986 and deeds of arrangement under the Deeds of Arrangement Act 1914.
[3] The figures for company insolvencies are made up of compulsory liquidations (winding-up orders made by the courts) and creditors' voluntary liquidations registered at Companies House.
[4] Individual Bankruptcy Orders plus Company Insolvencies
Source:
Department for Trade and Industry

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of trends in farmers' suicides in the past 12 years; and how many such suicides have taken place per month in the last 12 years. [74189]

Alun Michael: There were the following number of farmers' and farm workers' deaths classified as suicides per month in the 12 years 1989–2000 in England and Wales:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Month unknown	Annual total
1989	7	7	2	3	3	9	7	6	8	8	6	6		72
1990	10	4	7	8	8	6	5	5	9	5	3	6		76
1991	3	7	12	13	2	3	6	7	8	7	5	4		77
1992	5	10	9	4	3	5	8	6	5	4	5	8		72
1993	9	4	6	8	7	8	10	3	8	4	8	3		78
1994	3	6	9	6	5	7	11	1	8	2	4	4	1	66
1995	7	7	6	5	4	4	1	4	7	4	6	2		57
1996	8	5	3	11	7	4	4	3	6	4	2	8		65
1997	3	8	3	5	4	7	3	5	9	3	5	4		59
1998	4	2	5	13	7	5	4	2	6	6	8	10		72
1999	5	2	4	5	12	6	5	7	6	3	6	9		70
2000	7	8	3	4	4	6	5	4	5	6	5	2		59

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Figures for 2001 are not yet available.

In the Department of Health's "National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England", published in September 2002, farmers (and agricultural workers) are identified as a high risk occupational group. A suicide prevention strategy for England has been formulated by an expert advisory group through consultation with mental health professionals, researchers, survivors of suicide attempts, the voluntary sector, and others with relevant experience. The target is to reduce the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least a fifth by the year 2010. The implementation plan will be the responsibility of the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE).

Prior to this, the Government launched the Rural Stress Action Plan in 2001 with the aim of working in partnership to deliver support to make a difference to those in distress in rural areas. Its objectives are:

1. building on existing partnerships, and initiate new ones where there is little provision, to bring together organisations offering a range of types of support to rural people;

2. direct assistance to farming families, both financial and practical; and,

3. effective publicity to encourage those in need to make contact with helping agencies.

I recently announced the extension of the Plan for a third year, 2002–03; in total nearly £1m of public funding has been provided. Its existence proved of great value during last year's outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. We hope that this modest funding will go a long way to help convey the message that advice and information is available to those suffering distress in rural areas.

Common Agricultural Policy

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether steps are being taken in the context of the review of the EU Common Agricultural Policy and Structural Funds to move towards a fairer funding distribution between urban and rural and agricultural interests. [73994]

Mr. Morley: Common Agricultural Policy payments are made to producers and exporters on the basis of set eligibility criteria, regardless of whether they are from urban or rural areas. There are many traders in urban areas who receive CAP export subsidies. But by definition, the majority of recipients of direct production subsidy payments are from rural areas. Structural Funds are distributed on the basis of need: in the case of Objective 1 the criterion is an area whose population earns less than 75 per cent. of the EU average income. This applies equally between urban and rural areas.

Flood Defences

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 704–05W, on flood defences, on what basis her Department keeps financial records for expenditure incurred on flood defences in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [73656]

Mr. Morley: Flood management is a devolved responsibility. Records are kept of grant payments (and, for local authorities, supplementary credit approvals) made by this Department directly to the flood and coastal defence operating authorities (Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards) in England only. They are recorded at the level of individual payments and payee (in the case of the EA this is at Flood Defence Committee level) and the project to which they relate. It is possible to group payments, to total expenditure on a particular project, for all local authorities or on coast protection schemes for example, where the Department's payments database supports this.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) records revenue payments made by local authorities on flood and coastal defence for the purpose of paying Revenue Support Grant—the other mechanism by which the Government provides funding for flood and coastal defence works. Neither this Department nor the ODPM categorises payments in ways that might have assisted me to answer your previous Question and neither does the main operating authority, the Environment Agency. The Department does not routinely record other expenditure (by the operating authorities or other riparian owners).

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions *(a)* have taken and *(b)* are due to take place between (i) her Department and (ii) the Government and the Association of British Insurers regarding insurance of householders on identified flood plains; and if she will make a statement; [73508]

(2) what plans the Government have to assist households on flood plains to obtain insurance cover from the end of this year; and if she will make a statement; [73655]

Mr. Morley: There have been regular Ministerial and Official level meetings between Defra, Environment Agency, HM Treasury and Association of British Insurers (ABI) to address this issue. Meetings and discussions will continue over the coming months.

We continue to work very closely with the Environment Agency and ABI to build a mutual understanding of flood risk. This will help develop a shared understanding with the insurance industry of the true risks of flooding in particular areas, taking account not only of the indicative flood plain but also the current and future provision of flood defences, and help achieve the mutual aim of ensuring the continued availability of affordable flood cover as widely as possible after the end of the year.

Fisheries

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the letter of 14 August, Ref 172597/JD to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what monitoring has been done ot the safeguards in the Protocol with Mauritania to protect fish resources off the West African Coast. [74196]

Mr. Morley: The first meeting of the Joint Committee provided for under the EU/Mauritania Fisheries Protocol took place in June, at which the

implementation of the new 2001/2006 Protocol during its first year was reviewed. A joint scientific working party was established to examine the state of the stocks and report to the Joint Committee before 1 November 2002.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 14 August, Ref 172597/JD, what action she has taken during discussions on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy to seek a requirement that every bilaterial fisheries agreement should be accompanied by a rigorous stock assessment and conditional on an environmental and social impact assessment. [74197]

Mr. Morley: These are matters that we shall pursue when the Commission brings forward into the CFP reform discussions the relevant elements of its proposed Strategy for European distant-water fisheries, as foreseen in the Commission's "roadmap" communication on the reform of CFP issued on 28 May 2002.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards the transfer of fish from a trawler at sea onto a storage vessel for transportation to port. [73860]

Mr. Morley: The transhipment of fish stocks, subject to quota, between Community fishing vessels and receiving vessels has to be notified to the competent authorities of the Member States concerned in accordance with provisions of Article 11 of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2847/93, as amended. Separately the Receiving of Trans-Shipped Sea Fish (Licensing) Order 1982, as amended, prohibit the trans-shipment of pelagic sea fish onto non-fishing vessels within British fishery limits unless the receiving vessel is licensed. For the purposes of this Order pelagic sea fish are defined as mackerel, herring, sprats, pilchards and horse mackerel. Additionally UK fishing vessel licences prohibit the transhipment of any fish between under 10 and over 10 metre vessels.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy towards inclusion of the issue of fishing quota-capping in the next InterGovernmental Conference. [73823]

Mr. Morley: Since 1 January 1999, and with the agreement of the European Commission, all vessels fishing against UK quotas have to maintain a genuine economic link with coastal communities in the UK. We have no plans to raise the issue at the next meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement on the status of negotiations on the 12 mile derogation, with particular reference to the timescale; [73870]

(2) what negotiating points have been linked to the 12 mile derogation negotiating parties. [73871]

Mr. Morley: A Council Working Group of officials from EU Member States has been meeting in Brussels to consider the Commission's proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. No one has attempted to link the 12 mile derogation to other issues.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent estimate she has made of the size of the UK fishing workforce *(a)* within the fleet and *(b)* in dependent industries. [73868]

Mr. Morley: The most recent information available on the numbers of fishermen in the United Kingdom are for the situation in 2000 as drawn from surveys carried out by the Sea Fisheries Inspectorate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the Sea Fisheries Protection Agency in Scotland. The survey showed a total of 14,645 fishermen in the UK in 2001.

It is difficult to estimate the level of employment in dependent industries. This is due to it being difficult to define accurately which industries are involved, and in many cases these industries are not uniquely dependent on the fishing industry. The Department and the Sea Fish Industry Authority are currently jointly carrying out research into the relationship between jobs in fishing and jobs in the rest of the UK economy, with the results expected to be available within the next two to three months.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many UK fisheries vessels there are in each port of anchorage; and what proportion of them are foreign-owned. [73869]

Mr. Morley: At 30 June 2002 there were some 7020 licensed UK fishing vessels. Comprehensive information about the beneficial ownership of UK fishing vessels is no longer maintained. However it is estimated that some 117 vessels are wholly or partly foreign owned. A significant proportion of the fleet is nomadic and it is not practical to break down the above numbers in terms of ports of anchorage.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total tonnage was of the *(a)* white water and *(b)* blue water fishing fleet of the UK in (i) 1972, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 2002; how many vessels there were; and how many personnel were employed at sea. [73858]

Mr. Morley: The information requested, where available, is given in the table below. The white water fleet has been taken as those UK fishing vessels that are 10 metres or less in overall length, with the blue water fleet taken as those UK fishing vessels greater than 10 metres overall length. Data on the numbers of fishermen is not available in terms of type of vessel, only on the basis of those employed full time or part time, which is given in the table.

Available vessel data for 1972 are not comparable with data for later years. Statistics for the active fleet in 1972 understate the overall size of the fleet; the registered fleet exceeded the active fleet by about 3,000 vessels in 1990 when the earlier statistical series was replaced. Similarly, the basis used to measure the tonnage of vessels in 1972 (Gross Registered Tonnage)

is not comparable with that used in later years (Gross Tonnage), and generally results in smaller estimates of the tonnage of vessels.

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by her Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within her Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [74684]

Alun Michael: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 916W.

	1972[1]	*1997*	*2002*
Tonnage (at 1st January)[2,3]:			
Vessels less than 10 metres	n/a	20,095	19,768
Vessels greater than 10 metres	278,000	254,390	243,206
Total UK fishing fleet	n/a	274,485	262,974
Numbers of vessels (at 1st January)[2]:			
Vessels less than 10 metres	3,785	6,091	5,713
Vessels greater than 10 metres	2,286	2,576	2,008
Total UK fishing fleet	6,071	8,667	7,721
Personnel employed at sea during the year[4]:			
Full time	17,898	14,832	11,923
Part-time	4,115	3,772	2,722
Total numbers of fishermen	22,013	18,604	14,645

Notes:

[1] Estimates for 1st January 1972 relate to the active fishing fleet, while those for 1st January 1997 and 2002 relate to the registered fishing fleet.

[2] Data for 1972 relate to vessels below and above 40ft in length (12.2 metres).

[3] Data for 1997 and 2002 relate to the Gross Tonnage of registered fishing vessels as reported to the European Commission under the Multi Annual Guidance Programme for the structure of the UK fishing fleet. The data available for 1972 related to Gross Registered Tonnage of active fishing vessels, which is not comparable. Data for vessels below 40ft in length are not available.

[4] The information given in the column for 2002 relates the numbers of fishermen in the year 2001.

Refrigerator and Tyre Disposal (Cambridgeshire)

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding arrangements have been proposed to deal with disposal in the county of Cambridgeshire of *(a)* refrigerators and *(b)* tyres. [74222]

Mr. Meacher: We have announced a further £40 million for local authorities to cover the costs of fridge disposal this year. This is in addition to £6 million already allocated for the last financial year. It is not possible to provide a meaningful allocation for each authority. It is intended that £40 million will be distributed later this year through the Special Grant system.

The Landfill Directive is due to ban the disposal of tyres to landfill from mid-2006 by which time alternative ways of handling those tyres currently landfilled will need to be in place. At present 30 per cent. of used tyres are landfilled. However, the Government is supporting a number of research and development studies aimed at developing end markets for used tyre products which should become commercially available before the ban comes into effect. We do not anticipate, therefore, an additional burden on local authorities.

Domestic Energy Efficiency

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the target is for domestic energy efficiency improvements. [74227]

Mr. Meacher: The UK Climate Change Programme envisages savings of carbon emissions from domestic energy efficiency measures of up to 5 million tonnes a year by 2010.

The Government has announced its intention to produce a Domestic Energy Efficiency Strategy to ensure delivery of these savings and work on this is being taken forward in the context of the production of the Energy White Paper, which the Government aims to publish around the turn of the year. The White Paper will also address the recommendation of the Performance and Innovation Unit's Energy Review that Government develop energy efficiency targets for each sector of the economy, including a 20 per cent. improvement in domestic energy efficiency by 2010.

Domestic Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the total tonnage of domestic waste collected in the last recorded 12 month period. [74575]

Mr. Meacher: Figures from the Defra Municipal Waste Management Survey show that in 2000–01, 25,109,000 tonnes of household waste were collected in England.

Farm Tenancies

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the agendas and minutes for meetings of the cross-departmental working group in fiscal arrangements for farm tenancies. [73912]

Mr. Morley: The Department does not routinely publish minutes of cross departmental meetings such as those held to discuss fiscal measures affecting farm tenancies. Any requests for the release of this information will be dealt with in accordance with the Government's Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Second Edition, 1997) and the Freedom of Information Act when it comes into force.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the cross-departmental working group on fiscal arrangements for farm tenancies has been established. [73911]

Mr. Morley: Tax is a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and all parts of the tax system are kept under review as part of the Budget process. Cross departmental discussions on the tenancy related fiscal measures mentioned in the Policy Commission report on the Future of Farming and Food and the Plymouth University Report on the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 have taken place. Further discussions will take place as appropriate prior to the publication of the Government's strategy for sustainable food and farming in the autumn, which will include a full response to the Policy Commission recommendations.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made to allow farm tenants greater flexibility to diversify their income-earning activities on farms that they rent. [73910]

Mr. Morley: The report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food recommends that Defra should revisit the definition of agriculture used in tenancy legislation and suggests a broader definition might remove a potential obstacle to business development. The Government is keen to ensure that the legislative framework governing farm tenancy arrangements does not act as a barrier to tenant farmer participation in diversification activities. We are therefore considering this recommendation carefully and the conclusions reached will be made known in the autumn when the Government publishes its strategy for sustainable food and farming, incorporating a response to the Policy Commission's recommendations.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made in addressing issues relating to the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995, with particular reference to section 4 of that Act. [74047]

Mr. Morley: The Plymouth University Report on the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 made a number of recommendations involving section 4 of the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995. These recommendations are currently being considered in parallel with the tenancy related recommendations made by the Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming. The Government's approach to the recommendations made in both reports will be clarified when the strategy for sustainable food and farming, incorporating the response to the Policy Commission's recommendations is published in the Autumn.

Farming (EU Grants)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what proportion of UK farmers received European Community grants of over *(a)* £100,000 and *(b)* £500,000 per annum in each of the last five years; [73980]

(2) what proportion of UK farmers received European Union grants of under £10,000 per annum in each of the last five years; [73864]

(3) what proportion of UK farmers do not receive European Union grants. [73865]

Mr. Morley: The following table gives the numbers of addresses in England to which the specified levels of direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have been made in the last three years. Earlier figures are not readily available. We cannot estimate precisely the number of farmers who do not receive payments. The payment of CAP grants in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the devolved authorities. Farmers may also have received European Union grants under non-agricultural programmes.

CAP Financial Year	*Addresses to which payment was made of*		
	£1 to £99,999	*£100,000 to £499,999*	*Over £500,000*
1998–1999	63589	61	3
1999–2000	58238	1933	34
2000–2001	63497	1822	29

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total sum of grants by the European Union to farmers was in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other EU member states in the last year for which figures are available. [73859]

Mr. Morley: The United Kingdom received €4,058.9 million from the European Union under the Common Agricultural Policy during its 2000 financial year. The other Member States received the following:

Country	*Euro (millions)*
Austria	1,018.5
Belgium	954.7
Denmark	1,305
Finland	727.5
France	8,982.2
Germany	5,641.7
Greece	2,597.1
Holland	1,396.5
Ireland	1,678.3
Italy	5,031.1
Luxembourg	20.6
Portugal	651.9
Spain	5,469.3
Sweden	798

These figures include both direct aid and market support. Nearly all of the direct aid will have gone to farmers. Much of the market support expenditure will in the first instance have been paid to traders.

Organic Action Plan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how she will measure the success of the Organic Action Plan; and what funding is being made available for the introduction of the Organic Action Plan. [73355]

Mr. Meacher: The Group that drew up the Action Plan and, from April 2003, the Advisory Committee on Organic Food and Farming will draw up and publish detailed criteria for measuring the success of the strategy for developing a sustainable organic food and farming sector in England. Funding for the changes to the Organic farming Scheme to provide for payments for five year agreements and other measures such as marketing, processing and training will come from the

England Rural Development Programme. In addition £5m has been set aside over the five years beginning in 2003/2004 for the purpose of providing a grant to the organic industry to support its research priorities through the LINK programme.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent by the Government on foot and mouth preparations and exercises in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [73803]

Mr. Morley: Information on the costs of foot and mouth preparations and exercises is not available. The contingency plan for foot and mouth disease approved by the EC includes a requirement that each Animal Health Divisional Office has a local contingency plan. At February 2001, 19 of the 23 divisional plans had been updated in the previous year. In addition, these offices are required to hold at least one simulation exercise and to review staff training on dealing with disease outbreaks each year.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken to vaccinate against a future foot and mouth outbreak. [73887]

Mr. Morley: Routine vaccination to protect against future outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease is currently prohibited in the EU and neither the Royal Society nor the Lessons to be Learned Inquiries recommended it. This was also the view reached by the International Conference on Prevention and Control of FMD, held last December.

The Government is currently considering the recommendations of the Royal Society and Lessons to be Learned Inquiry Reports into the 2001 outbreak. We will take these recommendations into account when deciding what role vaccination may play in future outbreaks and what future research and development requirements are. These Reports will inform our preparation for discussions in the EU on a new FMD Directive later this year.

Emergency vaccination during a future outbreak is not ruled out, and it remains an option as part of the disease control strategy. Future scientific advances may allow vaccination a larger role and we are committed to funding research into the use of conventional vaccines to control FMD. We are currently developing more comprehensive contingency plans and field instructions for emergency vaccination and will engage stakeholders in future vaccination discussions.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations her Department made to the Commonwealth for assistance from veterinary experts during the foot and mouth epidemic. [73862]

Mr. Morley: Under the current International Veterinary Reserve Agreement (IVR), participating countries have agreed to provide veterinary assistance in the event of serious notifiable disease. The agreement was initiated in the very early stages of the foot and mouth outbreak. All countries covered by the agreement, some of which are members of the Commonwealth, participated in the eradication of foot and mouth.

Discussions were also held with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Subsequently, Embassies assisted with the identification of suitable veterinary candidates.

The Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) also wrote to all EU Member States seeking assistance from suitable veterinary staff.

Cameraria Ohridella

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the spread of Cameraria Ohridella; and what action her Department is taking. [74199]

Mr. Morley: I indicated in the answer I gave the hon. Member on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1198W, that it was considered highly likely that the Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner (*cameraria ohridella*) would spread to Britain. In July it was confirmed that the moth is now present in parts of Wimbledon. We have conducted a joint survey of the area and surrounding local Boroughs, and the Forestry Commission has placed baited pheromone traps at selected ports and towns in the south of England. So far the moth appears to be confined to the Wimbledon area but further spread is considered inevitable.

The Commission has alerted Tree Officers in the London Boroughs and it has distributed its "Exotic Pest Alert" publication describing the moth and showing the symptoms to look for. Trees will look unsightly following defoliation by the moth, but they will recover.

An EU research programme is underway which includes work to try to develop practical control methods. Forestry Commission scientists are in regular contact with the scientists in this programme and are also carrying out their own studies.

Agricultural Workers

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department have made of the effect of the Communities Vibrations Directive on working times for the agricultural workforce; if such an analysis was made at the time of initial discussions in the Working Group; what cost-analysis took place prior to final agreement; and if she will make a statement. [73824]

Mr. Morley: The Physical Agents (Vibration) Directive is a health and safety measure which is designed to protect workers from diseases such as vibration white finger and back pain. The Directive was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 21 May 2002. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) took the lead on behalf of the UK Government in negotiating the terms of the Directive.

The HSE carried out a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) (including a cost/benefit anaysis) as soon as the German Presidency presented the proposal for this Directive in January 1999. The RIA considers the impact of the Directive on UK industry as a whole.

This was updated in January 2001 after political agreement was reached in Council. Copies of the RIAs are available in the House of Commons Library.

The UK has played a leading role in maintaining the Common Position on the terms of the Directive in the face of more restrictive amendments proposed by the European Parliament. As a result the terms of the Directive should allow farm workers to use their tractors for at least 7 to 8 hours each day. Furthermore the provision allowing exposure to Whole Body Vibration (WBV) to be averaged over a 5 day period should allow one or two long days to be offset by low exposure on rest days. In addition the WBV exposure limit value for farmers will not come into effect until 2014—12 years time. The long transitional period should allow equipment design to be improved and old equipment to be replaced.

Plastic Bags

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answers to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) of 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 665W, what conclusions she has reached on the assessment of the effect of a plastic shopping bag levy on litter and waste reduction and on consumer behaviour. [73975]

Mr. Meacher: Work on the plastic bags issue continues within the Department and we are not yet in a position to reach conclusions. Also, the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) has decided to include the plastic bag tax and related issues in its wider review of waste strategy. It will therefore feature in the PIU, report, due out later in the year and the work carried out in the Department will help inform the report.

Organic Produce

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many litres of organic milk were produced in the UK last year. [73315]

Mr. Meacher: It is estimated that around 200 million litres of organic milk were produced in the UK during the year to end March 2002.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many organic producers there were in the UK in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [73316]

Mr. Meacher: As at 31 December 2000 there were 3,563 organic producers in the UK. As at 31 December 2001 there were 3,981.

Sheep Exports

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what report was made by her official who travelled on board the ship with the sheep which were sent from Dover to the Continent on 15 July; and whether the Dutch authorities have confirmed that the sheep were transported in accordance with the route plan submitted to her Department. [73696]

Mr. Morley: The report records that the overall journey was satisfactory and there were no adverse comments in respect of animal welfare. We have taken account of the practical experience gained from this first consignment when considering futher Route Plans.

The Dutch authorities have reported that the animals were either transported directly for slaughter in France or rested in the Netherlands before transport to slaughter in Italy.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in respect of the health certification carried out on the three consignments of live sheep exported from Dover to continental Europe on 21 July, how many of the sheep were rejected as unfit for the intended journey; where those sheep were taken; what problems were found in respect of the animals; what action was taken in respect of these problems; and what final destination address was given on the route plan for each of the consignments. [73695]

Mr. Morley: In respect of the three consignments of sheep exported on 21 July, no animals were rejected on inspection as unfit for their intended journey. The sheep were transported from approved assembly centres in North Wales and Kent via Dover and Holland to three EU approved slaughterhouses in France.

Domestic Waste

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tonnage of the domestic waste collection was reused as a raw material in the manufacture of *(a)* plastic, *(b)* glass, *(c)* paper and *(d)* board in the last recorded 12 month period. [74573]

Mr. Meacher: This information is not available.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what external advice she received regarding a duty on her to fund policies and programmes as a result of the requirement for her to have a 30 per cent. improvement in domestic energy efficiency as a principal aim under Part 1 of the Home Energy Conservation Bill; whether this advice suggests it would be within the terms of the Bill to make progress towards improving energy efficiency by *(a)* introducing new regulations and *(b)* energy efficiency programmes funded by bodies other than the Government; if she will place the advice in the Library; and if she will make a statement; [71006]

(2) what external advice she has received regarding burdens placed on local authorities by Part 1 of the Home Energy Conservation Bill; if she will place this advice in the Library; and if she will make a statement; [70950]

(3) what external advice she has received regarding the compatibility of a requirement for her to have a target as a principal aim when making decisions, as included in the Home Energy Conservation Bill and a requirement to meet that target as a statutory duty; if she will place this advice in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [71005]

(4) when the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire will receive answers to written parliamentary questions 70950, 71005 and 71006, tabled for answer on 19 July. [74577]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The Government has not sought any external advice on these matters. However, I am aware that the Bill's promoters sought legal advice on whether having a 30 per cent. improvement as a principal aim would have conferred a lesser obligation than a statutory duty to achieve this level of improvement, and whether it would have imposed any legal requirements on the Government to fund new obligations on local authorities.

We have received our own advice on the implications of having a 30 per cent. improvement in domestic energy efficiency as a principal aim in this Bill. These implications, including those for the Government and local authorities of any energy efficiency targets that the Secretary of State might set, how targets might be achieved, any constraints this might place on local authorities and the potential role of other energy efficiency programmes, have, of course, been discussed with other Government Departments. The Government is committed to funding fully the cost of any new obligations placed on local authorities, although this is not a legal obligation.

The Department has also received correspondence setting out a wide range of views on this and other aspects of the Bill, including from the Local Government Association, local authorities, trade associations, energy efficiency and fuel poverty groups and members of he public.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the total tonnage of waste was collected for recycling in the last recorded 12 month period; and what proportion of that was from *(a)* domestic and *(b)* industrial sources. [74576]

Mr. Meacher: Figures from the 2000–01 Defra Municipal Waste Management Survey show that for England, the latest tonnages of waste of municipal waste collected for recycling or composting were 3,442,000 tonnes, 2,812,000 of which was from household sources.

The proportion of household waste that was recycled or composted was 10 per cent.

Figures from the 1998–99 Environment Agency National Waste Production Survey, the most recent available, show that for England and Wales, 22,100,000 tonnes of industrial waste were recycled or re-used. The proportion of industrial waste recycled or re-used was 44 per cent.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much tonnage was collected from segregated domestic waste broken down by *(a)* paper, *(b)* plastic, *(c)* glass and *(d)* metals in the last recorded 12 month period. [74574]

Mr. Meacher: Figures from the 2000–01 Defra Municipal Waste Management Survey show that for England, the following segregated household waste were collected for recycling:

Material recycled	*Tonnages collected*	*As a percentage of total household waste*
Paper and card	910,000	3.6
Plastics	13,000	0.1
Glass	396,000	1.8
Scrap metal, white goods and cans	336,000	1.3

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tonnage of collected segregated waste has been *(a)* landfilled and *(b)* fly-tipped in the last recorded 12 month period; and what proportion this is of the total waste collected. [74572]

Mr. Meacher: This information is not available.

Timber

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measurements she uses to monitor the change in levels of use of sustainable timber in public buildings. [74604]

Mr. Meacher: The Sustainable Development in Government report, which replaces the Greening Government reports and is due in November, is intended to give information on the levels of timber and timber products supplied from legal and sustainably managed sources. The Government's future performance and contribution to sustainable development (including procurement) will now be monitored under the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate—the main vehicle for systematically assessing, managing, reporting and improving performance in operational areas.

Defra also commissioned consultants in October 2000 to undertake a timber scoping study to help buyers more effectively implement the Government's commitment actively to seek to procure its timber and timber products from sustainable and legal sources. Their findings are now being considered in the light of the reports published by the Environmental Audit Committee in July and by stakeholders at an open meeting on 2 September. The policy does not extend beyond central Government, but Defra Ministers and officials have been promoting it to the wider public sector.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the steps that are taken to ensure that only sustainable timber is used on public projects. [74603]

Mr. Meacher: Several of the Government's furniture suppliers are switching to certified timber sources as a result of the Government's policy on timber procurement (28 Jul 2000, *Official Report*, column 947W), the inclusion of these requirements in Departmental contracts and the work of public bodies such as NHS

Purchasing and Supply Agency. The Office of Government Commerce is reviewing its existing guidance and project management services contracts to draw attention to the Government's policy. Defra has also commissioned consultants to undertake a timber scoping study to help buyers to implement the commitment more effectively. The report on this study addresses, for example, the issue of assessing the credibility of suppliers' claims on the source of the timber supplied and the provision of expert help for buyers. A copy of the scoping study report is on the Tropical Forest Forum's web site. Look in Forum activities/Trade/ Timber Trade at http://www.forestforum.org.uk.

Birds

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the change in the numbers of birds; and what steps are being taken to encourage the growth of the songbird population. [73556]

Mr. Morley: The Department annually monitors the numbers of a whole range of birds, including songbirds, through the Breeding Bird Survey. This survey, conducted and funded jointly by the British Trust for Ornithology, the RSPB and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, assesses trends in the numbers of common species of birds across the country. A range of other surveys, funded by these organisations, assesses trends in scarcer species. Annual reports are produced for each of the surveys, but summary information derived from them is contained in the report *The State of the UK's Birds 2001*, which was published on 7 August.

It revealed:

Long term trends show that approximately 34 bird species including the buzzard, sparrowhawk, green woodpecker and the blue tit have increased between 1970 and 1999.

Most species of common bird have shown short term increases between 1994 and 2000.

The report also showed that over the period 1970 to 1999 19 species, including the marsh tit, have declined by more than 50 per cent.

Twelve further species have showed a moderate decline of between 25 and 49 per cent., including the dunnock and the lapwing.

Steps are being taken to encourage a growth in songbird numbers through

Biodiversity Action Plans, for species such as Skylark, Stone Curlew, Nightjar, Corn Bunting, and Song Thrush;

Agri-environment schemes, which are currently being reviewed: these provide significant funding for promoting environmentally sustainable farming practices; more than £1 billion has been made available for the seven-year period 2000 to 2007.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the regulatory burdens that would arise from the implementation of European Commission Draft Instrument 7396/02, dated 21 March 2002, concerning the control of high-activity sealed sources; and if she will place in the Library a copy of the regulatory impact assessment in the Library. [73553]

Mr. Meacher: The European Commission has made a proposal for a Council Directive on the control of high activity sealed radioactive sources, which is under discussion in Council working group. The department is currently carrying out an initial Regulatory Impact Assessment to gauge the potential costs and benefits of implementing the current draft of the Directive. This is expected to be ready in the autumn and will be provided to the European Scrutiny Committee. I shall also place a copy in the Library.

Horticulture Research International

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the future financing of Horticulture Research International. [74660]

Mr. Morley: Horticulture Research International (HRI) is undergoing a Quinquennial Review of its performance, organisational status and relationship with Defra. The Review Team's report was published on 23 September. Stakeholders have been invited to provide comments on the report by 18 November before Ministers take final decisions about HRI's future, including its funding arrangements. These decisions will also be informed by further analysis of the financial implications of implementing the Review Team's recommendations.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to ensure that the Countryside Agency's rural proofing checklist *(a)* is available to Government Departments and *(b)* informs policy decisions. [73989]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency's rural proofing checklist was launched in April 2001. At the time it was published in hard copy as well as published on the Countryside Agency's website. Copies were circulated round all Government departments, and promoted throughout departments by the Countryside Agency and staff in departments themselves. This is an ongoing process, with continuing liaison between Government departments and both the Countryside Agency and the Department. The Countryside Agency is currently revising the checklist and this will be published shortly, with a further promotion across Government.

The ongoing process of monitoring and evaluation that leads to the publication of the Countryside Agency's annual reports on rural proofing is the principal way to ensure that the checklist is used to inform policy decisions, and leads to rural solutions and outcomes. The continuing close liaison mentioned above also keeps the checklist at the front of policy makers minds, and the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Rural Renewal discusses such issues regularly.

French Beef

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 23 July 2002, ref 70633, if she has applied to the European Court to intervene in the case. [73698]

Mr. Morley: Once the Commission has lodged the case with the European Court of Justice, the Court will invite member states to apply to intervene. This stage has not yet been reached.

NFU

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations he has *(a)* received from and *(b)* made to the NFU; what was discussed; and when the next meeting will take place. [73842]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, along with other members of her Ministerial team, have regular contact with the NFU to discuss a wide range of issues.

Curry Report

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) which Curry Commission recommendations will be implemented; [72456]

(2) what percentage of her budget increase will be spent on the implementation of the Curry Commission's report; [72455]

(3) when she will outline the new strategy for sustainable food and farming in England; [73749]

(4) what specific reforms in line with the Curry report she estimates will be made possible by the Comprehensive Spending Review. [73779]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 26 March a series of early actions as a first step towards implementing the Policy Commission's report. A new Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food in England will be launched in the autumn. This will incorporate a response to all of the Policy Commission's recommendations and include details of a range of policy measures.

The recent Spending Review settlement demonstrates the Government's commitment to delivering on the vision identified in the report, providing the resources to address the Commission's core recommendations, including those aimed at improving the competitiveness of farming and the food chain and enhancing the ability of farming to deliver environmental benefits.

From our increased post-Spending Review budget of around £2.8bn p.a., more than £500m will be made available for investment in sustainable farming and food over the three years of the Spending Review. This includes an increase of £200m in 2005–06, which will allow full roll-out of an entry-level agri-environment scheme in that year, following successful pilots.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to support the dairy industry. [73756]

Mr. Morley: The dairy sector is supported at a European level by the Common Organisation of the Market for Milk and Milk Products. Recognising the difficulties caused for many dairy farmers by the current low price of milk, the Government has worked within this framework to back measures taken in Brussels to support EU Markets and encourage exports.

Bovine TB

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the negotiations between the Government and outside contractors regarding the backlog of cattle TB testing. [73731]

Mr. Morley: TB testing is carried out by the State Veterinary Service (including Local Veterinary Inspectors); there are no plans to change these arrangements. Contractors are being employed to help with the survey of badgers killed in road traffic accidents and negotiations are continuing with contractors over reducing the backlog in "TB99" epidemiological questionnaires.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what she estimates the total cost has been of Bovine TB testing delays to farmers. [73837]

Mr. Morley: A formal assessment of the cost to the farming industry of the delays in testing for bovine TB has not been carried out.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to pay more than market value for cattle compulsorily slaughtered under TB control measures. [73733]

Mr. Morley: There are no plans to pay more than the market value for cattle compulsorily slaughtered under TB control measures.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what cost analysis has been undertaken to assess how much the delays in testing for Bovine TB have cost the farming industry. [73840]

Mr. Morley: A formal assessment of the cost to the farming industry of the delays in testing for bovine TB has not been carried out.

Farming and Food Commission

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food; and what progress they have made since their formation. [73736]

Mr. Morley: The Policy Commisison on the Future of Farming and Food was set up in August 2001 to advise the Government on the creation of a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector in England. The Policy Commission presented its report to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State in January 2002, after which its work ceased. The Government welcomed the report, supported its broad analysis and conclusions and will publish a response in Autumn in the context of a new strategy for sustainable farming and food.

Agricultural Development Scheme

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the

eligibility requirements are of the Agricultural Development Scheme; and what will be the number and value of the grants distributed. [73757]

Mr. Morley: The eligiblity criteria are set out in the guidance notes for the scheme. In summary, projects must concern the organisation, promotion, encouragement, development, co-ordination or facilitation of the marketing of produce and not be eligible for aid under another grant scheme. Only non-capital expenditure can be grant aided, up to a maximum grant of £0.5m and a maximum grant rate of 50 per cent. Grant can only be awarded for "additional" activities (i.e. the applicant must demonstrate that the project would not take place without grant—or would only proceed on a significantly smaller of slower scale).

The number and value of grants will be decided in the light of the quality of applications received and the resources available, within the overall limits on individual projects summarised above. The resources available will be determined as part of our planned strategy for sustainable food and farming.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the priorities are of the new Agricultural Development Scheme. [73758]

Mr. Morley: The priorities for the Agricultural Development Scheme are:

Co-operation/ collaboration benefiting primary producers;

Benchmarking and spread of best practice;

Assurance schemes; and

Projects opening up new markets, for example, using crops for raw materials for industry.

Other projects will also be considered

Radioactive Materials

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the European Council Resolution 2002/C119/05 on the establishment of national systems for surveillance and control of the presence of radioactive materials in the recycling of metallic materials in member states, in respect of its application to the United Kingdom. [73555]

Mr. Meacher: Most of the Resolution's proposals are already covered by existing UK legislation, including the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 (as amended) and the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1999. Many of the measures proposed in the Resolution are mirrored in the draft Euratom High Activity Sealed Sources Directive, which is currently being negotiated.

The UK INTERPOL Environmental Crime (Radioactive Substances) Sub-Group (UKIECG), which is chaired by the Environment Agency, addresses the issue of illicit trafficking of "orphan" radioactive sources. The Environment Agency is also working closely with the metals recycling industry and with regulators in other countries on the issues covered by the Resolution.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much *(a)* low level, *(b)* intermediate level and *(c)* high level radioactive material was in storage in each year from 1973 to date. [73947]

Mr. Meacher: The information requested requires the interrogation of several past UK Radioactive Waste Inventories and I will write to the hon. Member with the details in due course.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the nuclear industry and *(b)* other departments regarding the safe disposal of nuclear waste. [74593]

Mr. Meacher: In a letter sent to all MPs on 29 July, my right hon. Friend, announced the results of the recent consultation on radioactive waste management and set out the next steps of the programme, including a review of all management options for intermediate and high level waste.

With this in mind, the Department plans to continue its frequent meetings with relevant stakeholders and interested parties, including the NGO's, technical and scientific experts, public engagement specialists and industry representatives, to discuss the issues at hand. This continual input, together with the information gathered from the four research projects that were run during the consultation period (which all involved a wide range of contacts, including stakeholders and the general public), should help formulate a successful programme.

The Department is also in daily contact with other Government Departments and the devolved administrations on this issue.

Carcase Burial Site, Petrockstowe

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will state, in relation to the carcass burial site at Ash Moor, Petrockstowe, *(a)* what the level of water table is below the surface of the land and *(b)* whether a microbiological study has been conducted into the use of the land for the burial of animal carcasses; if she will publish the environmental impact and risk assessments for the site and list the recommendations they made; which legal requirements were complied with before construction of the site started; what has been (i) the cost of work to date and (ii) the continuing cost of upkeep; what additional cost will be incurred if the site is brought into use for the burial of animal carcasses; and if she will make a statement. [10735]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 October 2001]:* pursuant to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Torridge & West Devon on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 301W. My answer referred to EA authorisation under regulation 18(3)*(a)* of the Groundwater Regulations 1998 granted on 12 April 2001. (construction at Ash Moor started on 20 April 2001). This was incorrect. The construction at Ash Moor started on 9 April 2001. The rest of the Answer remains correct.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes of 12 June, concerning drugs and the broiler chicken. [71274]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* I responded to the honourable member on 15 September.

TREASURY

E-Government

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a progress report on the Customs and Excise interactive data input and editing system for traders and if he will make a statement. [74780]

John Healey: The business requirement for an interactive data input and editing system has been included within the scope of the HM Customs and Excise e-Business Programme, to simplify the current technology and business processes. It represents better value for money for government while ensuring that businesses, including those involved in intra-Community trade, are offered simpler and more convenient ways to transact.

Intrastat Supplementary Returns can already be filed electronically and the new, flexible infrastructure will include technology to improve risk-based assurance of data and reduce the costs of compliance to a whole range of businesses. This will ensure that Customs and Excise is more responsive, agile and better able to meet its customers' needs.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish outturn figures for the pilot system for VAT declarations over the Internet; and if he will make a statement. [74777]

John Healey: The pilot system for making VAT declarations over the Internet ran from March 2000 to April 2001. Around 1,100 businesses used the service out of 2,500 businesses invited to do so.

The electronic VAT return (EVR) system went live in April 2001. Around 400 of those on the pilot system joined the live system. There are currently 4,250 businesses registered to use EVR. Of these approximately 2,700 actually use it.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what evidence was presented by Customs and Excise officials to the Bank of England on 19 September 1988 that Manuel Noriega had been using the Bank of Credit and Commerce International to launder money; [74516]

(2) if he will disclose the names of those officials attending a working lunch on 19 September 1988 between Customs and Excise and Treasury officials; and if he will make a statement. [74517]

John Healey: Information relating to matters which are currently the subject of, or directly connected with, court proceedings are exempt from disclosure under Exemption 4 (Law enforcement and legal proceedings) of the *Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.*

Global Poverty

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what progress was made on tackling global poverty at the recent G8 summit; [73665]

(2) what progress is being made through the World Bank and the IMF in tackling *(a)* global poverty and *(b)* land reform in developing countries. [73662]

John Healey: At the G8 Summit, in June, progress was made towards a more coherent approach to tackling global poverty. In particular, members welcomed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The G8 undertook to establish enhanced partnerships with African countries whose performance reflects the NEPAD commitments. This will focus efforts on countries that demonstrate a political and financial commitment to good governance and the rule of law, investing in their people, and pursuing policies that spur economic growth and alleviate poverty. The G8 will match African countries' commitment by promoting peace and security in Africa, boosting expertise and capacity, encouraging trade and direct growth-oriented investment, and providing more effective official development assistance. In addition, the G7 agreed in June to contribute their share of an extra $1 billion to finance the shortfall in the HIPC initiative.

At the Annual Meetings of the IMF and World Bank in September, further progress was made. In particular, the IMF reaffirmed its role in helping poor countries address the challenge of meeting the Millennium Development Goals by supporting economic reforms aimed at accelerating growth and reducing poverty. The Fund recognised that there may be a need to consider mobilising new resources if high demand for concessional financing continues, and stressed the importance of sound macroeconomic frameworks that can respond flexibly to changes in the external environment; identifying ways to encourage higher and sustainable growth; good governance; improving public expenditure and financial management systems; and using poverty and social impact analysis more systematically, and building country capacity in this area. In addition, the Bank and Fund reaffirmed the commitment to implement the HIPC initiative and finance it fully to help countries overcome the burden of unsustainable debt.

At the Development Committee meeting of the World Bank, commitments were made towards better coordination and cooperation amongst development partners and by effective alignment of donor support with country strategies. Members recognised the need for more intensified efforts to harmonise operational policies and procedures of bilateral and multilateral agencies, at both institutional and country levels, to enhance aid effectiveness and promote greater ownership by developing countries. The Bank and other donors committed to further action in streamlining their policies, procedures and requirements over the period

leading to the high-level forum scheduled in Rome in February 2003 and beyond. Members also requested the Bank and Fund to report back to them at next year's Spring Meetings on pragmatic and innovative ways to enhance the participation of developing countries in international institutions, and thereby to strengthen international dialogue.

Improving tenure security and access to land through appropriate land reform is a key element of the World Bank's Rural Development Strategy. Secure tenure and shelter for the poor are also important components of the Bank's urban programmes. The Bank is supporting land reforms in Latin America; throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; and in Asia, efforts appear to have been generally most effective in relation to poverty reduction. The Bank is preparing to re-engage with land reform in Africa (Ghana, Malawi, Niger, South Africa and Uganda).

The Department for International Development (DFID) is actively engaged with the World Bank in Africa to improve the effectiveness of Bank operations in land reform. In the other regions DFID seeks to support and improve the impact of World Bank interventions at policy level and through complementary support to development partners. The Bank is in the final stages of completing a major review of its work on land reform, to be captured in a Policy Research Report. DFID have contributed to the process, seeking to strengthen the linkage of Bank lending for land reform with improved livelihood opportunities for the poor and with nationally owned poverty reduction strategies.

Early Leavers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with other departments on reducing *(a)* its level of early retirements and *(b)* the number of people leaving early on sickness or ill health grounds. [73713]

Mr. Boateng: *(a)* There has been no discussion with departments about reducing early retirements or ill-health retirement for the various public service groups. However, a recommendation in the report of the Treasury led review of ill-health retirement in the Public Sector (published in July 2000) was that high level targets should be set challenging employers to reduce ill health retirement by 2005 to a level consistent with or better than those at present achieved by the best quartile of employers.

(b) There is no centrally held data about people leaving early on sickness or ill health grounds. The monitoring of people leaving early on sickness or ill health grounds is a matter for the sponsor departments of the various public service groups.

Commemorative Coins

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans Her Majesty's Government have for the issue of commemorative coins next year. [74806]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Her Majesty The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve my recommendation that the following commemorative coins should be issued in 2003:

a crown piece of five pounds face value to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of her Coronation;

a two-pound coin to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the structure of DNA;

a fifty pence coin to mark the hundredth anniversary of the formation of the Women's Social and Political Union.

Collector versions of these coins will be released early next year at a premium above face value and, during the course of the year, the coins will be also become available at face value from banks and post offices.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the performance and role of the Financial Services Authority over the last 12 months. [73738]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA is obliged under the terms of the Financial Services and Markets Act (2001) to produce an annual report assessing performance against its statutory objectives of maintaining confidence in the financial system, promoting public understanding of the financial system, securing an appropriate degree of protection for consumers and reducing the potential for financial firms to be used for financial crime. It is through this mechanism that the FSA is primarily held accountable to Ministers and Parliament.

The annual report for 2001/02 was published on 20 June 2002 (I refer you to my answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Ms. Follett) 20 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 454W) and Section 6 reports on performance against the statutory objectives. Copies of the report were supplied to the Treasury Committee and copies are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 June 2002 *Official Report*, column 447W, if he will set out the Financial Services Authority's proposed powers post-2004 in relation to the regulation of mortgages and general insurances. [74241]

Ruth Kelly: On mortgages, the Government published proposed powers for the Financial Services Authority (FSA) on 8 August. These can be obtained from the Treasury website www.hm—treasury.gov.uk. The Government will shortly be publishing for consultation draft legislation setting out FSA powers in respect of general insurance mediation.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what methodology was used to determine the targets in the Comprehensive Spending Review. [73770]

Mr. Boateng: The methodologies used varied between departments and targets.

Liabilities Insurance

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what Government assistance is available to companies that find it difficult to get affordable liabilities insurance. [74446]

Ruth Kelly: The Government is working with trade associations, insurance bodies and organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses to try and maximise the availability of affordable cover.

The key to securing affordable liability insurance over time will be improving the risks posed by companies—particularly in terms of health and safety for employees and the public.

Child Poverty

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what recent discussions he has had with the *(a)* public, *(b)* private and *(c)* voluntary sectors in combining the effort to end child poverty; [74425]

(2) what progress has been made on the commitment to end child poverty; what resources have been devoted to this commitment; and what achievements have been made; [74424]

(3) what plans he has to introduce standards against which the progress of the policies to end child poverty can be measured. [74426]

Dawn Primarolo: The government has made a commitment to reduce the number of children in low-income households by at least a quarter by 2004, as a contribution towards the broader target of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020. ("Low income" is defined as having an equivalised household income of less than 60 per cent. of median income).

Progress will be reported against the 1998–99 baseline figures of 4.2m children after housing costs and 3.1m children before housing costs. Between 1997–98 and 2000–01 the number of children in low-income households fell by 300,000 after housing costs and by 400,000 before housing costs. So we are a third of the way in a third of the time towards meeting the 2004 target.

By April 2003 the government will be spending £8 billion more on support for children each year, in real terms, than in 1997.

Low income is of course central to poverty. But poverty of opportunity is also important. In *Opportunity for All*, the government's annual anti-poverty report, we report progress in tackling poverty and social exclusion against a range of indicators. In April 2002 the Department for Work and Pensions launched a consultation exercise to debate the best way to measure poverty in the long-term. Academics and representatives from the voluntary and community sectors and local government all actively engaged in the debate. Results of the consultation will be published after a full analysis of the responses and technical implications.

In working towards the common goal of eradicating child poverty within a generation, my right hon. Friend has had numerous discussions with representatives from all sectors. Only through a genuine partnership can we ensure that children and young people are given every opportunity to progress in life.

Our strategy document, *Tackling child poverty—giving every child the best possible start in life*, stresses the importance of voluntary organisations in the pursuit of our long-term goal of poverty eradication. The Chancellor also meets ministers from the devolved administrations to consider joint or coordinated action, and exchange information and best practice in tackling child poverty and social exclusion in deprived communities. And the Government is pursuing contacts with the financial sector in efforts to tackle financial exclusion.

Pension Tax Reliefs

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the most recent annual cost was in tax forgone of superannuation and other pension tax reliefs; and what proportion of this was to the benefit of higher-rate taxpayers. [74644]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the cost of tax relief on pension contributions are contained in table 7.9 of Inland Revenue Statistics. The latest version is on the Inland Revenue website:
http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/pensions/p__t09__1.htm

Of the estimated £6.4bn relief on contributions by employees and the self employed in 2001–02 around £3.7bn is in respect of higher rate taxpayers and on employer contributions of the total of £9.5bn around £5.4bn is in respect of higher rate employees.

The employers' component is estimated on the basis that under present arrangements, employer contributions are not taxable as a benefit in kind of the employees. The estimates assume that the proportion of total employers' contributions relating to higher rate taxpayers is the same as that observed for employee contributions. It is not possible to apportion the other elements of the total cost of tax relief between higher rate taxpayers and others.

Estimates are provisional and based on the Survey of Personal Incomes 1999–2000.

Benefits in Kind

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the yield of extending the base of employees' national insurance contributions to benefits in kind; and if he will make a statement. [74120]

Dawn Primarolo: Replacing the Class 1A National Insurance contributions liability paid by employers on benefits in kind, with a Class 1 liability paid by employees and employers would raise around £150 million for 2002–03, rising to £150 million for 2003–04. These estimates do not make any allowance for changes in behaviour.

PEPs

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the total annual cost to PEP investors of the reduction in the dividend tax credit in April 1999 in each subsequent financial year; [74493]

(2) how many *(a)* general and *(b)* single company PEP plans were in existence in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02; and how many UK individuals had investments in PEPs in each year; [74488]

(3) what estimate he has made of the average annual cost to *(a)* each PEP plan and *(b)* each PEP investor of the reduction in the dividend tax credit to PEPs in April 1999 in the financial years *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [74492]

Dawn Primarolo: In respect of PEPs, the reduction in the rate of the dividend tax credit is estimated to have saved around £200m in each of the years 1999–00 to 2001–02. Reliable estimates of the number of plans and UK individuals holding plans, and hence of the average cost, are not available from adminstrative data.

Tobacco

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what target Customs and Excise has set for illicit market share in the tobacco market by 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [74773]

John Healey: Customs aim to reduce the market share of smuggled cigarettes to 20 per cent. by 2003–04. This target was published in the Tackling Tobacco Strategy in March 2000, a copy of which can be found in the Library of the House and in Customs' Public Service Agreement for 2001 to 2004.

Customs' aim is to reduce the market share of smuggled cigarettes to 17 per cent. by 2005–06. This target has been published in Customs' Public Service Agreement for 2003 to 2006.

VAT Fraud

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the National Audit Office will be invited to review the methodology for calculating VAT missing trader fraud; and if he will make a statement. [74127]

John Healey: The NAO commented on the steps that Customs have taken to measure the stock of fraud in their Audit of HM Customs & Excise under Section 2 of the Exchequer & Audit Departments Act 1921 which was published on 13 February 2002. Discussions about the approach and timing of a specific review of the methodology for calculating VAT missing trader fraud are underway.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many suspect VAT registrations have been refused under the programme to counter VAT missing trader fraud; how many missing trader registrations have been identified and cancelled since August 2001; what the value is of total injunctions secured since August 2001 against missing traders; and if he will make a statement; [74128]

(2) if he will provide an update of his November 2001 estimate of the cost of VAT missing trader fraud; and if he will make a statement; [74130]

(3) what estimate he has made of the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* absolute reduction in VAT missing trader fraud since September 2000; and if he will make a statement. [74129]

John Healey: Details of the size of this form of fraud and operational activities to tackle it were first set out in the "Tackling Indirect Tax Fraud" document published at the time of the November 2001 Pre Budget Report, and will be updated on a routine annual basis in line with the commitments made in that document.

Mapeley Steps Ltd

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the financial benefits accruing to the Inland Revenue as a result of the tax status of Mapeley Steps Ltd; [74490]

(2) what revenue the Treasury has received as a result of the decision to sell Inland Revenue buildings to Mapeley Steps Ltd and what was the value of alternative bids received; [74487]

(3) when *(a)* he and *(b)* the Paymaster General were informed of the decision to sell Inland Revenue buildings to Mapeley Steps Limited; and when he was informed of the announcement by the Inland Revenue that the company was based in Britain. [74489]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise "STEPS" competition was announced in August 1998. The two Departments' contract with the Mapeley consortium was signed on 6 March 2001 after a full procurement exercise.

A joint Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise press release dated 9 March 2001 inadvertently referred to assets being transferred to Mapeley Ltd, a UK registered company, rather than Mapeley STEPS Ltd which is registered in Bermuda. Subsequently, a separate press statement has corrected this. Ministers were not aware of the registration of Mapeley STEPS Ltd at the time of the March 2001 press notice.

The STEPS contract with the Mapeley consortium provided for the payment of £220 million to the Departments together with a further £150 million to be reflected in lower service prices. Details of the rival bids are, as is customary, commercially confidential. However, the competition to establish which bidder offered best value for money included rigorous examination of all factors relevant under the appropriate UK and European rules. By convention, the tax affairs of individual companies are not disclosed to Ministers. No separate assessment has been made of the effect of the tax status of Mapeley STEPS Ltd.

Strikes

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if she will state the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of days lost to strike action in the (i) private sector and (ii) public sector in each year since 1997. [74385]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tim Yeo, dated 15 October 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of days lost due to industrial action in the private and public sector each year since 1997. (74385)

There are no statistics specifically for the public sector but figures on the public administration; education and health industries provide most of the information on the public sector as it is today. In the table below the data for these sectors Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 75, 80 and 85 are presented alongside data for the rest of the economy.

Working days lost due to UK labour disputes

	Public administration education and health industries SIC 75, 80, 85		Rest of Economy	
	No of days lost 000's	% of total days lost	No of days lost 000's	% of total days lost
1997	65	28	170	72
1998	50	18	232	82
1999	66	27	176	73
2000	221	44	278	56
2001	331	63	194	37

Employment (Scotland)

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were estimated to be *(a)* employed and *(b)* unemployed in (i) Paisley North, (ii) Renfrewshire and (iii) Scotland in each of the last two years. [73671]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mrs. Irene Adams, dated 15 July 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment and unemployment in Scotland. (73671)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles statistics for employment and unemployment from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) following the internationally standard International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions. For parliamentary constituencies, the LFS provides estimates of employment and unemployment rates, but not levels. However, the survey sample size is too small to provide reliable estimates of unemployment for Renfrewshire Unitary Authority or Paisley North constituency.

The ONS also compiles statistics of claimants of unemployment-related benefit. The claimant count consists of all people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance credits at Employment Service local offices. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which the claim is made.

The attached tables give information from the LFS and claimant count. Labour market statistics are published in the monthly Labour Market Statistics First Release and on the Nomis® database, both of which are available in the House of Commons library.

Table 1 Employment and ILO unemployment in Scotland; all aged 16 and over

Thousands, seasonally adjusted

	In employment	ILO unemployed
March to May 2001	2,396	148
March to May 2002	2,388	176

Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 2 Employment rates[1] for Scotland; Renfrewshire and Paisley North; all people of working age[2]; 1999/00 and 2000/01

Per cent

	Scotland	Renfrewshire	Paisley North
Year ending February 2000	71.3	74.5	71.8
Year ending February 2001	73.1	75.4	63.4

Notes:
[1] Total employed of working age as a percentage of all persons of working age.
[2] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59.
Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey Local Area Database

Table 3 Claimant count levels for Scotland; Renfrewshire and Paisley North

Not seasonally adjusted

	Scotland[1]	Renfrewshire	Paisley North
June 2001	104,600	3,745	1,572
June 2002	102,700	3,774	1,596

Note:
[1] Data for Scotland are seasonally adjusted.
Source:
Jobcentre Plus administrative system.

Public Service Agreements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the data on *(a)* outputs and *(b)* resources underlying the report in the Customs and Excise Spring 2002 report (Cm 5427) on PSA 2000 target; and if he will make a statement. [74782]

John Healey: I have done so.

Death Certificates

Mr. Heath: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy for the time of death to appear on death certificates. [73419]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Heath, dated 15 September 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General, I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the time of death appearing on death certificates. (73419)

Generally, it would not be possible to record the time of death on death certificates accurately. In many cases the doctor who certifies the death may not be with his patient when they die and therefore would not know the specific time of death. The relative who registers the death also may not be able to say precisely when the death occurred.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to require practitioners completing death certificates to include illnesses for which there is medical evidence rather than clinical suspicion. [73420]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Heath, dated 15 October 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the requirements of medical practitioners completing death certificates to include illnesses for which there is medical evidence rather than clinical suspicion. (73420)

Medical practitioners are required to certify the cause of death for patients under their care. Current legislation requires them to "sign the certificate in the prescribed form stating to the best of his/her knowledge and belief the cause of death". Guidance issued to doctors asks that they describe the cause of death as fully and accurately as possible. They should describe the sequence of diseases or injuries which led to the death, and other conditions which may have contributed to it. These guidance notes follow the recommendations of the World Health Organisation.

There is considerable interest in death certification at present. The Fundamental Review of the Coroner Service has recently published a consultation document on possible changes to the way in which deaths should be investigated and certified. This can be found at http://www.coronersreview.org.uk/, or a paper copy requested from The Review of Coroner Services, 100 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HP. The closing date for responses is 22 November 2002. In addition, the Office for National Statistics will be consulting on modernisation of the civil registration system during 2003. Any future changes to death registration will also need to consider the recommendations that will come out of the Shipman Inquiry.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many transsexual people have applied to have their birth certificates changed since the European Court of Human Rights ruling on 11 July on the case of Goodwin and I *v.* UK. [73917]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 15 September 2002:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of transsexual people who have applied to have their birth certificates altered following the ECHR ruling in the case of Goodwin and I *v.* UK. I am replying in his absence. (73917)

The number of applications received at the end of September is 101. This excludes 2 requests from people born in Scotland which were referred to the Registrar General for Scotland.

Customs and Excise Reviews

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date he expects to complete Her Majesty's Customs and Excise reviews of the compliance costs of *(a)* excise gambling regimes, *(b)* customs procedures for international trade, *(c)* hydrocarbon oils, *(d)* alcohol duties and *(e)* tobacco duties; and if he will make a statement. [74131]

John Healey: Work on the studies into the compliance costs of excise duties and international trade is not complete yet. The findings will be considered and used to formulate future policies and procedures when they become available.

Bank of England

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the legal consequences of the vacancy for the deputy governorship of the Bank of England; and if he will make a statement. [74119]

Ruth Kelly: There were no legal consequences of the brief vacancy for the post of Deputy Governor for Financial Stability.

Inheritance Tax

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of the inheritance tax cultural exemption scheme; and if he will make a statement. [74121]

Dawn Primarolo: About £8m in 2001–02, including the value of objects accepted in lieu of tax and net of relief clawed back which was previously given under inheritance tax or its predecessors.

Drugs

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total quantity of Class A drugs targeted on the UK for financial year 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [74778]

John Healey: The National Criminal Intelligence Service United Kingdom Threat Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2002, estimates that in the region of 30 metric tonnes of heroin and up to 40 metric tonnes of cocaine are smuggled into the UK each year. There are no estimates for other Class A drugs such as ecstasy.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place the results of the research programme on the dynamics of the UK and international drugs market undertaken by Customs and Excise in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [74779]

John Healey: This research programme resulted in a number of confidential threat assessments which are covered by Exemption 2 (Internal discussion and advice) of the *Code of Practice on Access to Government Information* and it would not be appropriate to publish them. To the extent that the information is publishable it is contained in the National Criminal Intelligence Service Threat Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2002, to which HM Customs and Excise contributed. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions *(a)* ministers and *(b)* Treasury officials have met Mr. Patrick Butcher, former Finance Director of London Underground, since 1997; and what was discussed at each meeting. [74444]

Mr. Boateng: Treasury Ministers and officials meet a wide variety of people to discuss a wide range of issues.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average annual salary was, broken down by region and industry in the last 12 months. [73963]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Bill Wiggin, dated 15 October 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the average annual salary by region and industry. (73963)

The New Earnings Survey (NES) provides earnings data for Great Britain for full-time employees on adult rates of pay. The attached table shows the average annual earnings by region and industry for April 2001, the latest date for which figures are available.

Gross Average Annual Earnings of full time employees on adult rates who have been in the same job for more than 12 months

Region of workplace	Agriculture, hunting and forestry	Fishing	Mining and quarrying	Manufacturing	Electricity, gas and water supply	Construction	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods	Hotels and restaurants	Transport, storage and communication
	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)
North East	..	..	..	20,546	26,671	19,511	16,154	..	19,761
North West	..	..	..	22,168	25,636	21,477	18,583	13,504	20,650
Yorkshire and the Humber	..	..	..	21,035	24,908	21,556	18,563	..	18,822
East Midlands	16,038	..	..	20,853	..	21,155	19,731	..	19,110
West Midlands	..	..	..	20,718	..	..	..	..	20,138
South West	..	..	..	22,488	..	21,136	18,199	12,045	20,563
East	16,111	..	..	24,404	..	24,980	20,454	..	23,134
London	..	..	..	30,219	..	29,657	24,394	18,681	30,225
South East	16,256	..	..	26,272	27,466	24,012	24,295	17,164	23,705
England	15,984	..	27,767	22,872	28,214	23,171	20,897	15,967	23,240
Wales	..	..	..	20,271	..	19,585	16,243	..	19,318
Scotland	15,371	..	..	21,179	25,229	21,813	17,586	12,814	20,293.
Great Britain	15,805	..	30,599	22,632	27,827	22,909	20,455	15,515	22,906

Region of workplace	Financial intermediation	Real estate, renting and business activities	Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	Education	Health and social work	Other community, social and personal service activities	Private households with employed persons	Extra-territorial organisations and bodies
	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)	(£)
North East	..	21,138	19,808	19,992	19,024	..	..	..
North West	23,773	24,590	20,610	20,972	19,519	..	..	..
Yorkshire and the Humber	25,501	20,935	21,496	21,125	20,323	17,326	..	..
East Midlands	24,025	23,114	21,213	21,504	19,595	16,896	..	..
West Midlands	25,830	26,353	22,292	21,472	20,477	..	..	..
South West	27,059	22,927	21,702	21,454	18,608	17,894	..	..
East	24,712	26,107	22,401	23,066	20,070	19,439	..	..
London	..	39,293	25,633	25,979	24,248	31,442	..	..
South East	29,998	29,717	22,731	22,854	20,183	..	..	..
England	41,943	28,878	22,291	22,299	20,425	22,860	..	..
Wales	..	..	21,073	21,135	19,781	17,354	..	..
Scotland	26,069	23,712	21,168	21,001	20,226	..	..	..
Great Britain	39,861	28,223	22,050	22,094	20,364	22,560	..	..

Note:
".." denotes the data has been suppressed in line with NES publication criteria.
Source:
New Earnings Survey, April 2001

Endowment Policies

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints of mis-selling of endowment policies by independent financial advisers have been made to the FSA in the last three years. [73666]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 335–336W to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir).

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the proportion of people with endowment mortgages who have policies which are unlikely to pay the original sum borrowed. [73664]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 24 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Mr. Lucas).

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the tax credit advertising campaign outlined in the Treasury press release dated 16 September is expected to cost, broken down into the costs of each element of the campaign. [74726]

Dawn Primarolo: On 16 September the Inland Revenue launched a multi-media campaign to raise awareness of the changes to tax credits. This advertising campaign aims to encourage claimants of the existing tax credits and potential new claimants to make an application for Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit or both. The advertising in this launch phase is expected to run until March 2003.

Expenditure on advertising is currently estimated to be as follows

Television	± £6 million
Radio	± £0.7 million
Press	± £2 million
Online	± £0.3 million
Total	*£9million*

Note:
All figures are inclusive of VAT

Other elements of the campaign include direct mailings to existing tax credits claimants, and a response line set up to handle telephone calls prompted by the advertising. The final cost will depend on the number of reminders issued and the demand for the response line.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which tax credit application forms *(a)* are available on the internet for download and *(b)* can be filled in on a computer screen; and how many electronic application forms have been submitted over the internet for each relevant tax credit during the last 12 months. [74728]

Dawn Primarolo: Claim forms and guidance notes for the Children's Tax Credit can be downloaded from the Inland Revenue's website at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk.

For the new Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, people can find out whether they qualify, get a detailed calculation and claim online at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/taxcredits.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* the new tax credit claim pack being sent to existing WFTC/DPTC and children's tax credit claimants and *(b)* other information available to prospective claimants, including leaflets NTC/1 and NTC/2. [74725]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue began issuing claim packs to existing recipients of Working Families' Tax Credit, Disabled Person's Tax Credit and Children's Tax Credit in mid August. The pack contains six separate items;

A covering letter

The Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit Claim form

The notes to accompany the form

A publicity insert giving an overview of the timing and the process of making a claim

A leaflet from the Financial Services authority giving advice on bank accounts

A pre-paid return envelope

Other information for prospective claimants is as follows

Web-site

Comprehensive information is available on the Internet at www.inland revenue.gov.uk/taxcredits.

Leaflets and Posters

An introductory leaflet which sets out basic information on Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit will be made available to prospective claimants. This will be followed by a more detailed leaflet. Leaflets will be produced in Welsh and will be available in large print, audio and Braille. Summary information will also be made available in Bengali, Cantonese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese.

A range of A3 posters, one of which will be available in the languages above, are available to raise awareness of the changes and to promote some of the elements of tax credits, for example, help with childcare costs.

Information packs have been sent to individual members of the House of Commons, The Scottish Parliament and the devolved assemblies. Copies of the claim pack, the information pack the leaflets and posters will be placed in the Library.

Paisley, North

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are benefiting from *(a)* working families tax credits and *(b)* children's tax credits in Paisley, North. [73663]

Dawn Primarolo: For the number in receipt of the working families' tax credit, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W. Information about the children's tax credit (CTC) is not available by constituency. However, the number of families eligible for the CTC in Scotland is estimated to be 400,000.

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of this Department's measures to tackle poverty in Paisley, North. [73661]

Dawn Primarolo: Poverty is a complex multi-dimensional issue, affecting many aspects of children's lives—including income, health, housing, the quality of their environment and opportunities to learn. There is therefore no single measure of the number of families with children that have moved out of poverty in the Paisley North constituency.

However, it is possible to provide figures for take-up of some measures aimed at those on low-incomes for which my Right Honourable friend's departments are responsible. In February 2002 there were 1,888 Working Families Tax Credit recipients in Paisley North, compared with approximately one thousand Family Credit recipients in May 1997. In February 2002 there were 57 Disabled Person's Tax Credit recipients in Paisley North, compared with 22 Disability Working Allowance recipients in May 1997.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to refocus the work of HM Customs and Excise, Cowes; and what he means by the term refocusing. [73915]

John Healey: Customs plan to deploy their law enforcement resources on the Isle of Wight more proactively, unpredictably and productively across a wider area to focus more on the serious threats from drugs and cigarette smuggling and from oils, alcohol and tax fraud.

Broadband

Brian White: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in centralised procurement of broadband networks for Government use. [71401]

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in centralised procurement of broadband networks for Government use. [71405]

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for e-Commerce and Competitiveness at the Department of Trade & Industry announced on 26 June the letting of framework agreements by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) to enable the public sector to buy broadband services more effectively; and the setting up of a Regional Broadband Unit.

The frameworks procurement is underway and contracts are expected to be awarded next spring. The Regional Broadband Unit will be operational in November 2002. As part of the Unit, an OGC team will provide procurement assistance to the public sector. In addition, a DTI team of regional broadband advisors will ensure that public sector broadband procurement has the maximum impact on regional economic development.

Euro

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with representatives in local government on the subject of preparing for entry into the euro. [73711]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers have regular discussions with representatives from all parts of Government and such discussions cover a wide range of issues.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on preparing for entry into the euro. [73710]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has regular discussions with representatives from all parts of Government and such discussions cover a wide range of issues.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to recharge each department for the costs of possible entry into the euro. [73709]

Ruth Kelly: There are no plans to recharge departments for the costs of a possible euro entry.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of preparing for entry into the euro for *(a)* central Government, *(b)* local government, *(c)* business and *(d)* the UK economy. [73712]

Ruth Kelly: It is not possible to estimate the cost of an introduction of the euro.

The cost of a changeover would depend on the timing, the overall approach and individual management decisions.

Details of preparations in the public sector for a possible UK entry into EMU may be found in HM Treasury's Sixth Report on Euro Preparations published in July.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his Department has started the assessment of the five economic tests for membership of the euro; and if he will make a statement. [73976]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has said that it will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. The assessment has not yet started, but the necessary preliminary analysis—technical work that is necessary to undertake the assessment within two years as we promised—is underway.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will place in the Library a document in respect of all acts of Parliament placing powers and obligations on Her Majesty's Government and other parties in the United Kingdom whose functioning would be affected by United Kingdom accession to the European currency, indicating in each case the section of each act concerned and that of the respective legislative instrument of the European Union; [74117]

(2) if he will list each new obligation which would apply to the Government and others in the United Kingdom, on adoption of the Euro as a currency, stating in each case the treaty together with the party to which it would apply. [74118]

Ruth Kelly: If Government, Parliament and the people—in a referendum—decide to join a successful single currency, the transfer of legal responsibility for monetary policy to the European Central Bank would entail changes to the domestic legislation of the United Kingdom governing the formulation and conduct of monetary policy, at least to the extent necessary to ensue compatibility with the EC Treaty and the Statute of the ESCB.

The provisions of the EC Treaty and the Statute of the ESCB which would then become applicable to the United Kingdom are referred to in paragraphs 3 to 9 of

Protocol (No 11) to the EC Treaty (on certain provisions relating to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). In addition, legislation adopted under Article 123.5 of the EC Treaty would make the provisions necessary to enable the United Kingdom to move to the final stage of economic and monetary union.

Import Duties

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue that would be lost to Her Majesty's Government if HM Customs were no longer able to stop any British citizen returning to the UK with cigarettes and alcohol on which no tax had been paid. [74343]

John Healey: Customs and Excise make no estimates of the potential loss of excise revenue if Customs were no longer able to stop British citizens returning to the UK with alcohol and tobacco products.

Government Accounts

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will bring forward proposals on who should sign the whole of Government accounts; and if he will make a statement. [74124]

Mr. Boateng: The first whole of government accounts, covering the results and financial position of central government for the year ending 31 March 2004, should be published in early 2005.

The Financial Reporting Advisory Board will be consulted in 2003 on who should sign the accounts.

Pension Schemes

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discount rate is used for public sector pension schemes in the accounts published for financial years *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [74126]

Mr. Boateng: The discount rate for valuing the liabilities of defined benefit public service pension schemes in their accounts for 2000–01 and 2001–02 was set at 3.5 per cent per annum net of changes in retail prices. Bodies in the wider public sector which fall outside the Resource Accounting framework made disclosures using discount rates determined under accounting standards SSAP24 or FRS17 as appropriate.

Income Tax

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the full year yield of a 50 per cent. tax rate on *(a)* gross incomes and *(b)* taxable incomes of more than £100,000 a year for financial years, (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [74132]

Dawn Primarolo: The full-year effects of making the changes are set out in the table.

	Income tax yield in 2002–03 (£ billion)	*Income tax yield in 2003–04 (£ billion)*
(a) 50 per cent. rate for gross incomes over £100,000	4.0	4.5
(b) 50 per cent. rate for taxable incomes over £100,000	3.9	4.3

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the April 2002 Budget. These estimates exclude any behavioural response to the tax change.

Diesel

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he had made of the quantity of red diesel consumed at United Kingdom airports; and if he will make a statement. [74122]

John Healey: No information is currently available on which to make such an estimate. However, from 1 April 2003, as part of the package of measures announced in Budget 2002 to tackle oils fraud, those dealing in red diesel (rebated gas oil) and kerosene will need to register with, and provide certain information to, Customs and Excise about the supplies they make. While the main purpose of gathering this information is to help Customs target fraudsters, it will also provide management information about supplies and consumption trends generally.

Banking Services (Rural Areas)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to ensure that banking services are available to those living in rural areas. [73987]

Ruth Kelly: Innovations in the financial services industry are providing new products and varied delivery channels to increase consumer choice in banking services. However, specific groups can still be vulnerable to financial exclusion and that is why the Government is involved in a number of initiatives aimed at increasing access to financial services. Rural areas in particular should benefit from a programme of work to deliver banking services through the Post Office. A number of banks already have agency agreements with the Post Office, allowing their customers to withdraw cash and make deposits at post offices—an extension of the coverage of banks and services provided is planned. The development of universal banking services at the Post Office, from April 2003, will also significantly increase the accessibility of banking services.

Productivity

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the trends in productivity growth; and what the latest productivity growth figures are. [73746]

John Healey: The Government's most recent assessment of trends in productivity growth was set out in Budget 2002 (HC 592) and the accompanying paper "Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects". We will publish an updated assessment in this year's Pre-Budget Report.

Latest figures show whole economy productivity picked up strongly and grew at above trend rates between the first and second quarters of 2002, with output per job rising by 0.7 per cent and output per hour rising by 1.1 per cent.

Mortgages (Dual Rates)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to require mortgage lenders who operated a dual rate to compensate borrowers who took out loans at the higher rate. [74762]

Ruth Kelly: It is for the Financial Services Authority (FSA) to consider any wider implications of decisions taken by the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS), whether on dual interest rates or in other areas of its responsibility.

Equitable Life

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to make an announcement on the Penrose report into the affairs of Equitable Life Assurance; and if he will make a statement. [74465]

Ruth Kelly: The Penrose Inquiry is independent of the Government and the timetable for conducting the Inquiry is a matter for Lord Penrose. No deadline for reporting has been set. The Inquiry's remit covers a long period of time and the issues involved are both broad and complex. A firm deadline was therefore felt to be an inappropriate constraint on the range and independence of the Inquiry.

Lord Penrose has, however, made it clear that he is keen to ensure that the Inquiry proceeds as quickly as possible consistent with rigorously establishing the facts, producing an authoritative account and thoroughly identifying the lessons to be learnt.

I look forward to receiving the report of Lord Penrose's Inquiry as soon as he is able to complete it.

EU Tax Harmonisation

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the economic impact on the UK of the harmonisation, in the EU, of taxes on diesel fuel at current fuel prices and taxation levels. [73825]

Dawn Primarolo: The European Commission has recently published a proposal to introduce a single harmonised diesel duty rate for commercial users of 350 euros per thousand litres of diesel in 2010. The proposal also sets out transitional regimes in the interim period. If this proposed duty rate were applied now, it would cost at least £2 billion a year in revenue. The Government will make it clear that we see no reason for a harmonised diesel duty rate.

Financial Aid

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been paid in *(a)* subsidies, *(b)* grants, *(c)* tax reliefs and *(d)* other financial aid to (i) the farming industry, (ii) other rural recipients, (iii) the black community and (iv) the gay community in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [74613]

Mr. Boateng: Government support for the farming industry, rural communities, black communities and gay communities takes a variety of forms and a full breakdown in the format requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

However details on subsidies received by the farming sector are published in Agriculture in the UK 2001 (available in the Library of the House). In 2001–02 public expenditure to the agricultural sector in the UK under the Common Agricultural Policy and national grants and subsidies was £5.3 billion. This includes £2 billion on foot and mouth compensation payments and associated disposal costs.

Details of the costs of the main tax reliefs can be found in table A3.1 in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002, (also available in the Library of the House). We are unable to analyse the cost of tax reliefs in the format requested.

Nuclear Industry

Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer against which departmental budget the funding for the proposed Liabilities Management Authority, set out in CM 5552, Managing the Nuclear Legacy, will be attributed. [73564]

Mr. Boateng: The costs will fall to the Department of Trade and Industry's budget.

Public Servants

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received regarding the level of salaries of public servants; and what the outcomes were of those representations. [73835]

Mr. Boateng: Although we receive some representations, it is for employers across the public sector, including departments individually within the civil service, to determine the level of salaries for their own staff. We would expect to make that point in response.

Comprehensive Spending Review

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what role economic incentives have in respect of the targets in the Comprehensive Spending Review. [73769]

Mr. Boateng: Departments decide how to provide the right incentives to ensure delivery of their targets, as part of the delivery planning process.

Frozen Assets (Madagascar)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assets are held in the United Kingdom by *(a)* the Government and *(b)* other public authorities based in Madagascar; on what grounds action has been taken to freeze such assets; what mechanisms are available for concerned parties to (i) make representations and (ii) appeal against his action; and

what action has been taken by other European Union countries against accounts held by authorities in Madagascar. [74158]

Ruth Kelly: No assets held in the United Kingdom by the Government or other public authorities based in Madagascar have been frozen. Actions taken by other European Union countries are a matter for their Governments.

Census (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Office for National Statistics has to publish the results of the Census in Northern Ireland; and what the breakdown is of *(a)* the adult population and *(b)* children under 18 years of age in each parliamentary constituency by religious belief and perceived community origin. [74159]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 15 October 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking what plans ONS has to publish the results of the Census in Northern Ireland; and what the breakdown is of *(a)* the adult population and *(b)* children under 18 years of age in each Parliamentary constituency by religious belief and perceived community origin (74159)

As Registrar General for England and Wales, I have a statutory duty, under the provisions of section 4(1) of the Census Act 1920, to report the results of the Census in England and Wales to Parliament. The Registrar General for Northern Ireland has a similar statutory responsibility to report the results of the Census in Northern Ireland to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Thus, the ONS does not have any plans to publish detailed results of the Census in Northern Ireland.

However, the first results from the 2001 Census, presented in a report to Parliament on 30 September, and which set out the population figures by sex and quinary age group for each local authority in England and Wales, also included corresponding figures for Northern Ireland as a whole and for Scotland, so that total figures for the United Kingdom could be included in order to assist all Members of Parliament.

ONS also plan to publish a selection of key statistics from the 2001 Census for each UK Parliamentary constituency in a report, which is expected to be to be laid before Parliament around June 2003. This would include some summary information taken from the responses to the census question on religion, and would include counts of population by sex by age by main religious group. The Registrar General for Northern Ireland will decide what information on religious belief and community background of the population in Northern Ireland constituencies is to be included in this Report.

The more detailed results on religion in Northern Ireland will be produced, however, by the Registrar General for Northern Ireland in reports to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Earnings (Scotland)

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* each unitary local authority area in Scotland the *(i)* weekly median earnings and *(ii)* the distribution of earnings for those earning (A) under the point below which 10 per cent. of earners fall and (B) the point above which 10 per cent. of earners exceed, broken down by (1) male manual, (2) male non-manual, (3) all male workers, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual and (6) all female workers. [74312]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Michael Moore, dated 15 October 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the distribution of weekly earnings for workers in Scotland and the unitary authorities in Scotland. (74312)

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy. In the attached tables I have provided the available data for Scotland and the unitary authorities in Scotland only for those areas where the samples are large enough. These are based on the 2001 NES, the latest survey for which data are available.

Distribution of Gross Weekly Earnings of full time employees on adult rates of pay

	Male Non-Manual			*Male Manual*			*Male All*		
		Ten percent earned			*Ten percent earned*			*Ten percent earned*	
	Median (£)	*less than (£)*	*more than (£)*	*Median (£)*	*less than (£)*	*more than (£)*	*Median (£)*	*less than (£)*	*more than (£)*
SCOTLAND	*465.7*	*246.7*	*845.2*	*323.7*	*206.2*	*514.3*	*388.8*	*222.6*	*720.8*
Aberdeen City	568.1	252.7	1067.2	337.0	197.5	682.9	451.5	232.8	972.2
Aberdeenshire	..	..	..	332.2	205.6	503.8	388.3	230.3	685.1
Angus	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Argyll & Bute	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Scottish Borders, The	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Clackmannanshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Dumfries & Galloway	..	..	..	316.3	199.1	434.1	345.5	212.9	666.9
Dundee City	..	..	..	328.1	196.0	494.4	385.5	220.8	683.3
East Ayrshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
East Dunbartonshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
East Lothian	..	..	..	314.4	208.0	439.4	..	..	..
East Renfrewshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Edinburgh, City of	493.0	247.3	881.0	326.5	196.4	530.9	425.6	225.1	793.0
Falkirk	..	..	..	365.9	224.8	730.2	379.7	216.6	710.9
Fife	431.0	215.5	715.7	316.0	215.5	491.4	354.8	215.8	627.8
Glasgow City	465.1	236.5	863.7	322.1	198.3	513.0	400.0	219.8	767.8
Highland	477.5	245.5	729.4	316.6	202.7	472.7	363.7	209.0	628.4
Inverclyde	..	..	..	358.5	191.8	479.5	..	..	..
Midlothian	..	..	..	301.9	214.4	496.3	351.2	226.7	578.8

Distribution of Gross Weekly Earnings of full time employees on adult rates of pay

	Male Non-Manual			Male Manual			Male All		
	Median (£)	Ten percent earned less than (£)	Ten percent earned more than (£)	Median (£)	Ten percent earned less than (£)	Ten percent earned more than (£)	Median (£)	Ten percent earned less than (£)	Ten percent earned more than (£)
Moray	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
North Ayrshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	405.1	208.8	700.0
North Lanarkshire	448.3	258.2	770.6	348.5	212.6	529.3	380.3	235.4	683.3
Orkney Islands	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Perth & Kinross	..	..	..	287.4	184.1	451.7	373.1	204.5	638.2
Renfrewshire	486.6	250.0	856.2	343.6	177.5	505.6	408.0	221.3	772.0
Shetland Islands	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
South Ayrshire	..	..	..	354.6	224.4	528.7	393.2	225.7	678.6
South Lanarkshire	..	..	..	336.2	225.4	520.2	391.6	237.7	686.7
Stirling	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
West Dunbartonshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
West Lothian	..	..	..	332.1	218.4	544.0	383.3	230.5	682.8
Western Isles	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

Note:
".." denotes the data has been suppressed in line with NES publication criteria.
Source:
New Earnings Survey, April 2001

Distribution of Gross Weekly Earnings of full time employees on adult rates of pay

	Female Non-Manual			Female Manual			Female All		
	Median (£)	Ten percent earned less than (£)	Ten percent earned more than (£)	Median (£)	Ten percent earned less than (£)	Ten percent earned more than (£)	Median (£)	Ten percent earned less than (£)	Ten percent earned more than (£)
SCOTLAND	*316.7*	*198.0*	*562.6*	*212.3*	*151.1*	*345.0*	*295.8*	*181.6*	*536.6*
Aberdeen City	349.1	213.4	586.0	..	..	..	316.3	181.3	533.1
Aberdeenshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	236.1	146.4	498.6
Angus	324.9	208.8	509.8	..	..	..	268.5	170.8	492.9
Argyll & Bute	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Scottish Borders, The	..	..	..	213.6	151.6	259.3	..	..	..
Clackmannanshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Dumfries & Galloway	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Dundee City	302.0	194.2	526.0	236.9	168.8	337.2	276.7	188.5	492.2
East Ayrshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
East Dunbartonshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
East Lothian	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
East Renfrewshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Edinburgh, City of	351.9	216.0	630.4	..	..	..	336.5	207.0	614.2
Falkirk	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Fife	299.9	184.7	535.7	223.2	154.6	359.0	267.3	178.5	492.2
Glasgow City	316.8	206.1	557.7	196.3	148.2	344.1	307.2	192.4	547.2
Highland	299.9	183.1	551.8	..	..	..	292.0	177.1	537.8
Inverclyde	..	..	..	..	..	..	272.0	188.5	478.9
Midlothian	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Moray	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
North Ayrshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
North Lanarkshire	296.5	198.3	536.6	197.9	160.8	319.4	277.8	183.0	504.0
Orkney Islands	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Perth & Kinross	287.9	172.7	535.6	..	..	..	267.3	163.2	503.7
Renfrewshire	330.5	198.4	564.7	..	..	..	294.3	178.8	536.6
Shetland Islands	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
South Ayrshire	347.4	211.8	552.0	310.1	200.7	546.3			
South Lanarkshire	343.9	201.8	583.3	..	..	..	305.4	188.5	542.8
Stirling	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
West Dunbartonshire	..	..	..	..	..	..	271.0	166.9	446.0
West Lothian	..	..	..	..	..	..	316.0	200.2	550.2
Western Isles	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

Note:
".." denotes the data has been suppressed in line with NES publication criteria.
Source:
New Earnings Survey, April 2001

Commissioner for Public Appointments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answers of 24 July 2002, *Official Report* column 1197–99W, on the Commissioner for Public Appointments, *(a)* for which panel an additional candidate was put forward and *(b)* which bodies only have informal performance assessment systems in place; and if he will make a statement. [74279]

Ruth Kelly: *(a)* An additional candidate was put forward for the post of non-executive director of the Court of the Bank of England.

(b) The Treasury is considering whether it is appropriate to introduce formal performance assessment processes for the Court of directors of the Bank of England and the Commissioners of the Statistics Commission.

Fuel Duty

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds of fuel duty rebates and reduced rates of duty on *(a)* red diesel and *(b)* kerosene in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [74774]

John Healey: The most recent estimate of loss in revenue to the Exchequer resulting from the duty rebate given to "red diesel" is approximately £3.3 billion in each of the past three years, based on the difference between the duty rate for rebated gas oil and that for heavy oil used as a road fuel. Such estimates for kerosene currently do not exist.

The estimates for red diesel represent the maximum cost to the Exchequer since they do not allow for a reduction in demand that might be expected if the full duty rate were levied on red diesel.

It is our policy to review rebates and reduced rates as part of the Budget process. In making his judgment, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will consider all relevant economic, social and environmental factors.

Trader Liabilities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of outstanding trader liabilities were written off by Customs and Excise in the latest year for which data is available; and if he will make a statement. [74772]

John Healey: The latest available figure is £769.8 million, as published in Customs & Excise's annual Trust Statement for 2000–01. Figures for 2001–02 will be published in the 2001–02 Trust Statement later in the year.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the p519 latest estimate of outstanding trader debt as defined in Spending Review 2000 PSA target one for Customs and Excise; and if he will make a statement. [74775]

John Healey: Achievement of the Spending Review (SR) 2000 PSA Targets, Objective 1, was published in H M Customs & Excise Spring Report June 2002. The third quarter outturn for trader debt to 31 December 2001 was 1.88 per cent. against the target of 1.41 per cent.

The full year results for 2001–02 will be published later this year, in H M Customs & Excise Autumn Performance Report, along with the emerging outturn for 2002–03.

Depleted Uranium

Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what quantities of depleted uranium have been exported to the United States in each year since 1997. [73560]

John Healey: The table below shows the quantities (in kilograms) of depleted uranium and products containing depleted uranium that were exported to the United States each year from 1997 to 2001:

	Cermets containing uranium depleted in U235	*Uranium depleted in U235; alloys, dispersions (other than cermets), ceramic products and mixtures containing uranium depleted in U235 or compounds of this product*	*Total*
1997	nil	41kg	41kg
1998	1kg	26kg	27kg
1999	2kg	14kg	16kg
2000	nil	nil	nil
2001	nil	nil	nil

Population Profile

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the population are over *(a)* 75 years and *(b)* 85 years in (i) Worthing, West, (ii) England and (iii) the UK. [74767]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Bottomley, dated 15 October 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the proportion of the population over 75 and over 85 years in the parliamentary constituency of Worthing West. (74767)

Although the first results of the 2001 Census have just been published they are only currently available for local authorities in five year age groups.

In view of this, the attached table gives the proportion of the population 75 and over and 85 and over in Worthing local authority, England and the UK at Census day 2001.

Area	*Proportion of the total population aged 75 and over* %	*Proportion of the total population aged over 85 and over* %
Worthing Local Authority	13.5	4.6
England	7.5	1.9
UK	7.5	1.9

Service Delivery Agreements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish updated service delivery agreements; and if he will make a statement. [74771]

Mr. Boateng: Departments will publish their service delivery agreements soon.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies. *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by her Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within her Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [74674]

Dr. Howells: The available information requested for the Department, including the Royal Parks Agency, shows total costs incurred to be £3,394,385. Further details could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Stonehenge

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when work will commence on the construction of the Stonehenge Visitors Centre; and if she will make a statement. [72609]

Dr. Howells: The date for the start of work on the Visitor Centre is not yet known and will depend on the outcome of statutory planning procedures. However it will not open until the flyover to replace the Countess Roundabout has been completed.

Tourism

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tourists visited Huntingdonshire in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 1999. [74225]

Dr. Howells: The table below sets out figures showing numbers of overnight stays and day trips in Huntingdonshire in 1999 and 2000. * Figures for 2001 are unavailable.

Year	*Day Trips*	*Overnight Stays*	*Total Trips*
1999	3.9 million	378,000	4.278 million
2000	4 million	541,000	4.541 million

Note:
* Data is not available by tourist numbers, but is collected in the form of day trips and overnight stays.

Physical Activity

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what studies her Department has made of the links between physical activity and improved health. [73814]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has not commissioned any studies of the links between physical activity and improved health.

I regularly have discussions with my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health on a wide range of issues related to sport policy, including the relationship of sport and health. It is agreed that the promotion of sport plays a valuable role and my Department has been working closely with the Department of Health to ensure co-ordination of sport and health policy.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department has considered recently to increase participation in physical activity amongst adults. [73816]

Mr. Caborn: The Government's Plan for Sport sets out the importance of engaging and motivating a wide range of organisations to develop new initiatives, strategies, projects and schemes that will offer more opportunities for participation for adults and the whole community,

In addition the New Opportunities Fund PE and School Sport programme is investing £581 million in England towards school sports facilities, £25 million of which will go towards the Space for Sport and Arts initiative, a £130 million investment to create more than 300 multi-use facilities in primary schools. All facilities will be made available for use by the whole community.

DCMS has also been allocated £20 million for 2003–04 from the Capital Modernisation Fund which will be distributed to both provide new facilities and improve existing facilities.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what role her Department plans for *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* voluntary sports clubs in improving public health. [73815]

Mr. Caborn: The Department and the Department for Education and Skills, supported by the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, are working on a project to effect improvements to PE and School Sport and build stronger school/club links so young people can carry on playing sport when they leave school.

The Strategy Unit is also looking closely into this issue as part of their overall review of the structure of sport.

Playing Fields

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many new playing fields have been created under the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities project. [74301]

Mr. Caborn: Under the New Opportunities Fund's Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities initiative, £22 million has been allocated for schools and community playing fields. Hitherto, nineteen projects have been awarded grants amounting to £2,071,997. Of these, five include the creation of new playing fields.

Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Project

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the projects which have been funded under the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities project. [74302]

Mr. Caborn: Under the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities initiative, the New Opportunities Fund will deliver projects worth £125 million across The United Kingdom through 11 award partners. Hitherto,

£38,027,240 has been committed to 1,230 projects under this initiative. The table below details the number of projects funded, and the amount committed so far, by each award partner.

Organisation	*Number of Projects*	*Amount committed (£)*
England		
Barnardo's	50	2,933,620
BTCV	93	715,346
The Countryside Agency	134	1,933,602
English Nature	111	4,946,078
RSNC	231	7,605,950
Sustrans	57	5,043,000
Sport England	337	5,843,692
Northern Ireland		
NIHE	52	500,725
Scotland		
Fresh Futures	35	704,368
SLF	72	6,254,271
Wales		
WCVA	58	1,546,588
UK Total	*1,230*	*38,027,240*

Communications (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if the Government will consider *(a)* satellite and *(b)* cable delivery platforms to implement the commitments regarding the extension of reception of the signal TG4 in Northern Ireland made by the Government in the Belfast Agreement in 1998; [74087]

(2) if the Government have identified terrestrial delivery options from transmitters located in Northern Ireland in seeking to implement the commitments regarding the extension of reception of the signal TG4 in Northern Ireland made by the Government in the Belfast Agreement in 1998. [74086]

Dr. Howells: We are considering the technical feasibility of improving the coverage of Irish language television services in Northern Ireland terrestrially. It is already open to Irish broadcasters to negotiate the carriage of their services on digital satellite, for reception in Northern Ireland, with the platform provider. Similarly, it is for the broadcasters to determine the viability of providing cable television services in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she intends to include provisions in the Communications Bill to provide statutory implementation measures for the commitments regarding Irish language television production in Northern Ireland made by the Government in the Belfast Agreement in 1998; [74082]

(2) if she will provide for the establishment of an Irish language production fund in Northern Ireland in the Communications Bill to implement the commitments regarding financial support for such production in Northern Ireland as made by the Government in the Belfast Agreement of 1998. [74085]

Dr. Howells: We are currently giving careful consideration to these issues following responses to the consultation on the draft Communications Bill. I will write to the hon. Member shortly with a more detailed response.

Screen South

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding is provided by the Film Council to Screen South in 2002–03; what element of that funding is provided for *(a)* the salaries of Screen South staff and internal administration and *(b)* for direct support of appropriate activities in the region. [73356]

Dr. Howells: In the financial year 2002–03 the Film Council will provide £879,267 to Screen South through the Regional Investment Fund for England (RIFE). Screen South staff carry out many activities in the region, for example location services for incoming film productions, which are funded from £300,200 of the RIFE allocated to salaries and internal administration. The remaining funds (£579,067) are used to support a range of other activities in the region including film production, exhibition, education and training.

Broadcasting

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many representations he has received from hon. Members, other individuals and organisations in connection with the statutory ban on religious organisations holding several categories of broadcasting licence; and how many and what percentage of those representatives supported the continuation of such a ban. [73830]

Dr. Howells: The Government's papers, "A New Future for Communications" published in December 2000, and "Consultation on Media Ownership Rules" published in November 2001, confirmed that we planned to bring forward legislation to allow religious bodies to hold a local digital sound programme licence. Both papers invited further views on whether the restrictions on ownership of other terrestrial licences by religious bodies should be relaxed. We received approximately 14,500 (6,500 and 8,000 respectively) responses from MPs, organisations and members of public, virtually all of which, broadly supported the lifting of the current restrictions.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what limitations there are on the spectrum available to broadcasters allocated on new digital muliplexes; and if she will make a statement. [73943]

Dr. Howells: Multiplex service licences have been granted to the BBC and to Crown Castle by the Independent Television Commission under the terms of the Broadcasting Act 1996, as described in the ITC invitation to apply for digital licences issued on 1 May 2002. The Act currently requires that at least 90 per cent. of the capacity on any multiplex must be available for programme or programme-related services.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for what reasons there are restrictions on the broadcast of religious music. [73985]

Dr. Howells: There are no restrictions on the broadcast of religious music.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for what reasons religious persons are limited in the broadcast licences for which they can apply. [73986]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 June, *Official Report*, columns 273W–274W.

Gambling

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what action her Department is taking to improve research into the incidence of problem gambling and if she will make a statement; [74498]

(2) what action her Department is taking to improve services to problem gamblers; and if she will make a statement. [74497]

Mr. Caborn: We have encouraged the gambling industry to support the charitable trust which it has established with a remit to fund both research into problem gambling and services for its treatment. The trust has already made good progress towards the target of £3m a year which was proposed by the Gambling Review Body; and my officials have been helping the trust to develop a sound strategy for improving prevention and treatment provision. Looking ahead, we have also made clear our intention to include in legislation to reform and modernise the regulation of gambling in Great Britain both: *(a)* reserve powers to require licensed gambling operators to fund this work; and *(b)* an obligation on them in any event to comply with a code of practice on social responsibility, to be published by the new Gambling Commission when established. We intend that one of the Commission's duties should be to keep the regulatory requirements under review in the light of evidence about problem gambling and to consider whether adjustments may be required accordingly.

Sports Clubs (Charitable Status)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how sports clubs which are industrial and provident societies are able to secure charitable status. [73530]

Mr. Caborn: Under the Charities Act 1993, sports clubs which are set up as charitable industrial and provident societies are considered to be exempt charities and are therefore unable to register with the Charity Commission. However, charitable industrial and provident societies are already eligible for the tax advantages of charitable status without having to register with the Commission.

It is possible to set up an industrial and provident society as a non-charitable organisation and clubs which have chosen to do this would be eligible to register with the Charity Commission as community amateur sports clubs with charitable status.

TV Licences

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her consultations with the BBC about amending the television licence fee regulations to protect the rights of people in sheltered accommodation when the social mix or level or warden cover change; and whether she plans to keep the current rules in force. [74710]

Dr. Howells: Consultations between officials and the BBC about the proposed changes to the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary television licence scheme are still in progress. We remain committed to the introduction of preserved rights to the ARC concession for existing beneficiaries, when the social mix or the level of warden cover in their sheltered housing change, and we intend to bring forward amending regulations as soon as we can. However, it is important that in doing so we do not create any new anomalies or unnecessary administrative burdens.

Sittingbourne Football Club

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she will have with Swale Borough Council about the future of Sittingbourne Football Club at Central Stadium, Sittingbourne. [73166]

Mr. Caborn: Funding applications for grass roots football are matters for the Football Foundation.

I understand that the Football Foundation have had no contact to date with either Swale Borough Council or the management of Sittingbourne Football Club in regard to an application for grant aid.

Grants of up to £150,000 are available to grass roots football clubs who meet the Foundation's criteria. However, it is for the management of the football club or the council to contact the Football Foundation to discuss eligibility for funding.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which members of the Government are scheduled to attend the Commonwealth Games; and what the estimated cost is of their visits. [73778]

Mr. Caborn: The following Members of Government attended the Commonwealth Games in an official capacity:

Prime Minister

John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister

Jack Straw, Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Richard Caborn, Minister for Sport

Baroness Blackstone, Minister of State for the Arts

Maria Eagle, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Work and Pensions

Ian McCartney, Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions

David Jamieson, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport

Baroness Amos, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The total cost of their travel and accommodation was £9,299.65. Travel arrangements were in accordance with the arrangements for official travel set out in chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code, and the accompanying guidance document, "Travel by Ministers".

The following Members of Government attended the Games in a private capacity and incurred no cost to the public purse:

Geoff Hoon, Secretary of State for Defence

Hazel Blears, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department of Health

Ivan Lewis, Parliamentary under Secretary of State, Department of Education and Skills

Christopher Leslie, Parliamentary under Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Stephen Timms, Minister of State for e-commerce & Competitiveness, Department of Trade and Industry

Beverley Hughes, Minister of State, Home Office

Lord Macdonald, Minister for the Cabinet Office

Phil Woolas, Assistant Government Whip

Healthy Living Centres

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many healthy living centres have been opened in the United Kingdom; when the *(a)* first and *(b)* last ones were opened; and what plans she has for further such centres. [74461]

Mr. Caborn: The New Opportunities Fund's Healthy Living Centres grants programme was launched in 1999 and in total 349 award offers have been made across the UK. The first award was made in November 1999 to the St. Augustine's Centre in King's Lynn, Norfolk. The centre officially opened on 27 April 2001 on completion of building works.

The last awards were made in September 2002. The New Opportunities Fund expects projects to start work within six months of accepting an award, although official openings may take place later than this. As a result, there will be Healthy Living Centre project openings throughout 2003 and possibly longer. The programme is now closed to new applications and there are currently no plans for a further Healthy Living Centre grants programme in the future.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Ministerial Cars

Bob Spink: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many ministerial and other staff cars were available in his Department in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [73043]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department currently has 4 ministerial cars and 655 staff cars. Of these, 552 belong to the Court Service with 80 per cent. allocated to bailiffs and the remaining 20 per cent. to staff that need to travel regularly as part of their work.

The fleet increased from 584 in April 2001 when LCD assumed responsibility for cars used by the newly created CAFCASS. During the previous four years the fleet size remained broadly constant.

Magistrates Courts (Fines)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total UK figure is for outstanding fines imposed by magistrates' courts. [74612]

Yvette Cooper: Magistrates' Courts Committees have a responsibility for the collection of a range of debts imposed by Magistrates' courts and the Crown Court, as well as other agencies. Debt collected includes not only fines, but also fees, compensation, confiscation orders, legal aid contributions and some maintenance orders. It is not possible to separate out only fines from the total, nor those imposed by Magistrates' courts and still outstanding.

The total "arrears" of debt at 31 March 2002 (which relates to England and Wales) was £246 million. However, most fines are paid by instalment, by agreement with the court, while the "arrears" figure reflects the fact that technically all of a debt is due immediately, whether or not an instalment order has been made.

The Government is committed to improving the enforcement of financial penalties and lead responsibility for warrant execution was transferred from the police to Magistrates' Courts Committees (MCCs) on 1 April 2001, giving MCCs control over the whole enforcement process.

Since then, we have established an information sharing scheme, which enables Magistrates' courts to obtain basic information on defaulters from the Department for Work and Pensions. We have also set performance targets for 2002–3 and MCCs have been provided with some £10 million extra from April 2002 under a netting-off scheme, ring-fenced for enforcement purposes.

Electoral Registration

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of people have chosen not to have their electoral registration details sold for use by any person for any purpose; what steps he has taken to ensure that electoral registration officers can identify unauthorised use by those who have access to the closed version of the full register; and if he will make a statement. [74587]

Yvette Cooper: This information will not be available until after 1 December, the date by which registers based on the 2002 annual canvass must be published. There are no plans to collect the information centrally. Unauthorised use of the full register is a criminal offence and is therefore a matter for the police rather than electoral registration officers.

Solicitors (Complaints)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the supervision of complaints against solicitors by the OSS. [74748]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Office for the Supervision of Solicitors (OSS), the Law Society's complaints handling wing, is already subject to independent scrutiny by the Legal Services Ombudsman. The Lord Chancellor has no current plans to instigate a further review of complaints handling, however he has warned the OSS that unless swift and substantive improvements are made across the board, he will not hesitate to implement his reserve powers which allow for the establishment of a Legal Services Complaints Commissioner. In addition, he has announced recently a review of the framework for regulating legal services. The first step in the review will be to decide what it should cover in terms of services and providers and what issues it should address.

Queen's Counsels

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to reform the appointment register for Queen's Counsel. [74749]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor, issued a Consultation Paper, "In the public interest?", in July, seeking evidence to enable the Lord Chancellor's Department to address concerns expressed in the Office of Fair Trading Report, "Competition in Professions". The Lord Chancellor keeps the detailed selection process for appointment of Queen's Counsel under constant review and has introduced a range of recent changes to improve the openness and accountability of the system.

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, *pursuant to his answer* of 17 July, *Official Report*, column 412W, on the Public Guardianship Office, if he will make a statement on the level of customer complaints about the Public Guardianship Office. [73890]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Of the complaints received the most common theme was delay. The PGO has, in the course of major restructuring, and a move out of central London, lost a large number of experienced staff. It is now taking steps to restore service levels, including: a local recruitment campaign, intensive training courses, re-siting of case files adjacent to case work teams, a reconfiguration of the new telephone system and the introduction gradually of an electronic records management system to replace the largely paper based one.

Witnesses

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the facilities required adequately to house witnesses seperately from those charged and appearing before street crime courts. [73724]

Yvette Cooper: My officials identified 70 street crime courts. The courts were identified according to the following criteria:

Separate entrance for witnesses or a facility to separate them immediately upon arrival. Separate secure waiting area for witnesses.

Availability of witness support service.

Separate lavatories and catering facilities or provision to prevent intimidation when using them.

Capacity of the court to cope with projected workload.

Current adequate performance.

Availability of adequate public transport.

Work has been commissioned at each designated street crime court, to ensure that court accommodation meets these criteria. The majority of these works will be completed in the courts by the end of September 2002. Where they have not yet been completed, local arrangements are in place to separate witnesses on arrival.

Magistrates Courts, Wiltshire

Mr. Key: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress he has made on reorganisation of magistrates' courts in Wiltshire; and if he will make a statement. [72612]

Yvette Cooper: I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Magistrates Courts, Essex

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she expects to make a decision on the appeal by Thurrock Council about the Private Finance Initiative Scheme for magistrates courts in Essex; and whether progress can be made with proposals for a new court house in Colchester in the meantime. [73381]

Yvette Cooper: I have agreed to meet the interested parties to discuss the issues raised in the appeal, and will do so as soon as a suitable date has been arranged. I will not be in a position to determine the appeal until after this meeting.

Once the appeal has been concluded consideration will be given to the outline business case for the Essex PPP scheme, which includes proposals for a new court in Colchester.

Transsexual People

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps are being taken, following the judgment in the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Christine Goodwin *v.* the United Kingdom, to ensure that domestic law complies with Articles 8 and 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights in respect of transsexual people. [73516]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1082W].

Public Record Office

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what guidance has been issued to departments relating to the retention of e-mails for possible future submission to the Public Record Office. [73954]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Key guidance has been issued for the management of e-mails within government departments, with a view to their future retention as public records. The Public Record Office published "*Management, appraisal and preservation of electronic records—Vol 2: Procedures*" in 1999, which gives detailed advice on standards, procedures and policies for managing e-mails as records.

Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) when special measures direction providing for vulnerable or intimidated adult witnesses to use TV link facilities, available under Section 21 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, will be available in all areas; [73526]

(2) when special measures direction providing for vulnerable or intimidated adult witnesses to give video recording of their evidence, available under Section 23 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, will be available in all areas; [73524]

(3) when special measures direction providing for the exclusion of the public from court whilst a vulnerable or intimidated witness gives evidence, available under Section 25 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, will be available in all areas; [73523]

(4) when special measures direction providing that wearing of wigs and gowns be dispensed with whilst a vulnerable or intimidated witness gives evidence, available under Section 26 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, will be available in all areas; [73522]

(5) when special measures direction providing for a video recording of an interview of a vulnerable or intimidated witness to be admitted as that person's evidence-in-chief, available under Section 27 of the Youth and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, will be available in all areas; [73521]

(6) when special measures direction providing for cross examination of a vulnerable or intimidated witness to be video recorded and admitted as evidence, available under Section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Act 1999, will be available in all areas; [73528]

(7) when special measures direction providing for examination of a vulnerable or intimidated witness to be conducted through an interpreter, available under Section 29 of the Youth and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, will be available in all areas; [73527]

(8) when special measures direction providing for the witness to be provided with such a device as the court considers appropriate to enable questions or answers to be communicated to or by the witness despite any impairment which the witness has or suffers, available under Section 30 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, will be available in all areas. [73525]

Yvette Cooper: Sections 21, 23, 25, 26, 27 and 30 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 referred to in the questions came into force on 24 July 2002 in all areas of England and Wales. Sections 28 and 29 are not yet in force. The courts have facilities to deal with the new special measures. There are TV Links in all Crown Court centres and video recording equipment and interpreters are available. More equipment is to be fitted this financial year to cope with demand. There is no single device that will solve all issues resulting from hearing impairment, but each case is treated on its merits and arrangements made accordingly. This may include a hearing loop, voice amplification or a signer etc. Video link equipment will also be installed in 154 Magistrates Courts by September 2002. Vulnerable and intimidated witnesses facilities are already fitted in 133 Magistrates Courts.

Data Protection Directive

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary Lord Chancellor's Department, in relation to the recent proposals published by the Government in relation to amendment of the Data Protection Directive 95/46/EC, if he will identify the source that suggested each of the proposals in the publication; and if he will make a statement as to his plan of action and timetable with respect to these changes. [74479]

Yvette Cooper: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the proposals in the paper proposing amendments to Directive 95/46/EC which was submitted to the European Commission in the names of Austria, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom on 13 September. The joint paper was attached to the second part of the United Kingdom's response to the European Commission's questionnaire to Member States' Governments about the implementation of the Directive. The first part of the Government's response was submitted to the Commission on 14 June. I am placing copies of both parts of the response, including the joint paper, in the Library.

It would be difficult to identify which Member State was responsible for making a particular proposal, since initial proposals were often significantly amended in the course of discussion. Moreover, identifying the source of the proposals would be inconsistent with the accepted convention that one Member State should not reveal another Member State's negotiating position.

The responses to the Commission's questionnaire will inform the report that the Commission are preparing on the implementation of the Directive. The Government hopes that, in preparing their report, the Commission will give serious consideration to the United Kingdom's response, including the joint paper. I understand that the Commission's present objective is to produce the report by about the turn of the year.

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence and Security Committee

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the reports produced by the Intelligence and Security Committee, excluding annual reports to him. [73957]

The Prime Minister: In addition to the Intelligence and Security Committee's four Annual Reports and one Interim Report, I have, since May 1997, laid the following two reports on special subjects before the House:

Report on Sierra Leone May 1999

The Mitrokhin Inquiry Report June 2000

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to give a substantive reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed of 26 March about policy announcements to Parliament. [73902]

The Prime Minister: I replied to the right hon. Member on 1 August.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will take steps to ensure that the Treasury Minister to whom he has referred for reply letters to him from the right hon. Member Manchester, Gorton dated *(a)* 9 July with regard to Ms S. Nutter and Ms L. Roberts, *(b)* 17 July with regard to Mr. S. Pennells and Dr. V. Hay, *(c)* 22 July with regard to Rev Canon Peter Vowles, *(d)* 4 July with regard to Ms H. Andrews, *(e)* 29 July with regard to Ms K. Fletcher and *(f)* 30 July with regard to Ms C. Mitchell and Ms N. Flanagan replies; and if he will request explanations from Her Majesty's Treasury for its delay in responding to these letters; [74627]

(2) if he will instruct the Secretary of State for Health to reply to the letter to him dated 27 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A. Battersby; and if he will request an explanation from that Secretary of State for the delay in replying to that letter. [74628]

The Prime Minister: I understand that my hon. Friends, the Minister of State for Health and the Economic Secretary replied to my hon. Friend's letters on 11 September and 23 September respectively.

I have written to my right hon. Friend explaining that I place great importance on the efficient handling of all correspondence and take an active interest in our performance in this regard. As far as I am aware all the letters he has raised have now been answered.

Patriotism Envoy

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Prime Minister what studies and initiatives have been undertaken since he appointed a patriotism envoy; and at what cost. [74263]

The Prime Minister: I have not appointed a patriotism envoy. However, the Government has undertaken a range of initiatives on this issue. For example, the Department for Education and Skills, in partnership with the Citizenship Foundation, has run British identity roadshows in London, Sheffield and Cardiff at a cost of around £5,000. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (the hon. Member for North Swindon) (Mr. Wills) has given four seminars hosted by the Social Market Foundation on this issue. He has also written a pamphlet on this issue published by the Social Market Foundation and several newspaper articles. There was no cost to Her Majesty's Government.

Faith Envoy

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* engagements undertaken by the hon. Member for Leeds, West since his appointment as unofficial faith envoy; and *(b)* articles and interviews authorised by the envoy; and what initiatives are planned in the next two months. [74264]

The Prime Minister: Shortly after the last general election I asked the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) to take on an informal role as my unofficial representative to the faith communities thereby serving as an extra channel of communication between faith groups and Government. Since his appointment he has met with many religious representatives. As it is an unofficial role the hon. Member is primarily responsible for deciding and arranging his engagements and written contributions.

Peerages

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister how many peerages have been created since May 1997. [73903]

The Prime Minister: 269 life peers have been created since 1 May 1997. This includes peers nominated by my predecessor but created after the 1997 General Election. Of these, 116 have been appointed specifically either as Labour Ministers or as Labour working peers.

British Energy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what recent discussions he has had about *(a)* the future of British Energy and *(b)* the future of nuclear power generation in the United Kingdom; [74392]

(2) when he was first informed that there were concerns about the financial viability of British Energy. [74391]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, kept me informed, as she was informed by British Energy of its financial position.

The Government is currently carrying out a review of energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper around the turn of the year. The review includes consideration of the role of nuclear power generation.

Arnab Banerji

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Prime Minister what role he played in the appointment of Arnab Banerji as the Prime Minister's adviser on financial matters; and what formal mechanisms are in place for liaison between Dr. Banerji and the Treasury. [74491]

The Prime Minister: I have appointed Arnab Banerji as a special adviser in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 50 of the Ministerial Code. He is employed under terms and conditions set out in the *Model Contract for Special Advisers.*

WORK AND PENSIONS

Drug Dependency

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what Government services are available for people with drug problems who are seeking work; [74401]

(2) what recent steps have been taken to ensure that people recovering from drug problems are ready to enter a working environment; [74402]

(3) what benefits are available for those in work and still dependent on drugs to ensure that they do not relapse. [74403]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are committed to helping unemployed people who have decided to kick their drug habit and move into work. Our policies and programmes are helping people with drug problems to overcome them and lead healthy and productive lives, a key aim of the Government's Anti-Drugs Strategy.

Jobcentre Plus provides a wide range of help for people recovering from drug problems, including early access to programmes like the New Deal and Work Based Learning for Adults.

In addition, we are introducing progress2work, a £40 million initiative to give unemployed people who are recovering from their drug problem the extra help they need to get into work.

Progress2work will provide specialist support to help recovering drug mis-users to make the best use of our welfare to work initiatives and move into jobs. It will equip Jobcentre Plus staff with the skills and knowledge they need to better identify people whose drug mis-use puts them at a disadvantage in the labour market, and refer them to appropriate provision.

We launched the first progress2work projects in the spring in 27 pathfinder areas throughout the country, including one in my hon. Friend's constituency. The second phase of the initiative begins in a further 36 areas from this month. We plan to roll out the programme nationally from next year.

In progress 2 work, close contact is maintained with jobseekers when they move into work or training to anticipate and assist, where necessary, with any problems that may cause them to drop out or relapse. The assistance given is dependent on the individual's needs but can include, for example, referral to a drugs agency, help with accommodation and debt problems, or confidence building and support to manage the transition into employment.

Post Office

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what restrictions there will be on Post Office customers collecting *(a)* child benefit, *(b)* pensions and *(c)* other benefits at post offices; and which bank accounts will not be accessible via the Post Office. [74361]

Malcolm Wicks: We have given a commitment that all customers who wish to collect their benefit or pension in cash at post offices will continue to be able to do so.

The Post Office already has arrangements with some High Street banks—Girobank/Alliance and Leicester, Lloyds TSB, Barclays, Cahoot, Smile and Co-op Bank, and First Direct (Scotland only)—to provide their banking facilities free of charge to customers. The Post Office also provides a cheque cashing facility for customers of other banks, but a charge is made for this service.

From April 2003, these arrangements will be complemented with the main banks and the Nationwide Building Society making their basic bank accounts widely available through post offices. The Post Office is also developing a Post Office card account. This will only be available through post offices and will allow benefit and pension customers to access their cash without charge at the post office.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whether he plans to allow applicants to open a Post Office account *(a)* in person at post office counters and *(b)* in writing; [74359]

(2) when Post Office accounts will be available. [74360]

Mr. McCartney: Customers who wish to open Post Office card accounts will need to discuss their account options with the relevant paying Department. They will then be given a letter to take to their Post Office branch where they will be issued with an application form. The Post Office plan to have available the card account service from April 2003.

Disability and Carers Service

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will extend the one day impairment awareness courses for decisions makers in the Disability and Carers Service which cover mental health and learning disabilities to other impairments; [74135]

(2) If a course on deaf awareness will be developed for decisions makers in the Disability and Carers Service. [74136]

Maria Eagle: There is an on-going programme of training for all staff in the Disability and Carers Service, which includes a one-day module on Disability Awareness encompassing a range of disability issues, including deaf awareness, together with two specialist one-day modules for Decision Makers covering Mental Health and Learning Disability issues. There is a commitment to review the scope of the Programme with a view to extending the specialist modules for Decision Makers to other impairments in due course.

Deafness

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it the policy of his Department to ensure that every deaf person who needs assistance with completing a disability living allowance or attendance allowance claim form and who cannot access the telephone form completion service is entitled to a home visit instead. [74138]

Maria Eagle: The Disability and Carer's Service policy, in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, ensures accessibility of information for all disabled people. If a deaf person requires help to complete a benefit claim form for Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance and cannot use the telephone forms completion service, which includes text phone facilities, we would arrange an interview with the appropriate interpreter present. The interview could take place at the nearest Social Security office but, if this presents difficulties for the customer, we could arrange for it to take place at home.

Nut Allergies

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason disability living allowance and carers allowance are not available to the parents of children with nut allergies. [73901]

Maria Eagle: Children with nut allergies are not precluded from entitlement to Disability Living Allowance, and neither are their parents precluded from receiving Invalid Care Allowance for looking after them. But they must meet the usual qualifying conditions for the benefits. For Invalid Care allowance this means that the carer must not be engaged in full-time paid employment and must provide regular and substantial care for a least 35 hours per week to a severely disabled person receiving either the middle or highest rate of the Disability Living Allowance care component. To qualify for that component, a severely disabled child must have a need for attention, supervision or watching over by another person which is substantially in excess of the needs of an able-bodied child of the same age.

SERPS

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his advertising campaign on rights to inherited SERPS, for what reason there are special rates for women born in a particular four month period, as set out in the footnote to these advertisements. [74452]

Mr. McCartney: Women born between 6 July 1950 and 5 October 1950 will attain state pension age after 6 April 2010, and will therefore be able to pass on up to 50 per cent. of their SERPS.

This is because their state pension age is over 60 as part of the equalisation of state pension age.

Incapacity Benefit

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on the entitlement to passported help available to claimants who have received the higher rate of incapacity benefit for over 12 months; [73888]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effects of recent changes to the long rate incapacity benefit. [73889]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have reformed Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) in order to provide more support to young people disabled early in life who have never had the opportunity to work.

From 6 April 2001 young people whose incapacity begins before the age of 20 (or 25 for those continuing in education until age 20) may qualify for IB even if they have not satisfied the contribution conditions. Existing SDA recipients under the age of 20 on 6 April 2001 were automatically transferred to long-term IB in April 2002. We estimate that around 175,000 young people will benefit from the change over time.

Depending on their circumstances people receiving IB can qualify for help with the cost of NHS treatment on the grounds of low income. They may also be entitled to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Social Fund crisis loans are available to people who are without resources, irrespective of their benefit status, to prevent serious damage or risk to health or safety in the event of an emergency or a disaster. A variety of local government schemes and benefits are also available to people on low incomes. Details of these schemes are not held centrally.

We recognise that some young people who transfer from SDA to IB will no longer have automatic entitlement to this help but many in this group will already be considerably better off as a result of the changes we have introduced and it would be unfair to treat these people differently to other IB recipients.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the proportion of parents with care in receipt of income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance and corresponding benefits in earlier years, who were in receipt of child maintenance in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* the latest year for which figures are available. [71036]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is set out in the table below. No reliable estimates for parents with care, on a comparable basis to those for 1997 and 2002, are available for 1979 and 1993. Figures for 1997 and 2002 are for parents with care with a full maintenance assessment.

Year	*Caseload[1] ('000)*	*% receiving maintenance (income-related benefits[2]/tax credits)*
1997[1]	345	40
2002[1]	654	40

Notes:
[1] Information based on the Child Support Quarterly Summary of Statistics, for February in each of the years, which is a 5 per cent. sample of all "live and assessed" cases on the Child Support Computer System.
[2] Income-related benefits covered are Income Support and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, for both years, and Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance for 1997 only.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of benefit claimants receive their benefits by automated credit transfer, broken down by parliamentary constituency, at the latest date for which figures are available. [74720]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. Statistical information that is readily available, can only be provided by individual benefit for each parliamentary constituency. This information has been placed in the library.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location and *(c)* sources were of attributable (i) articles, interviews or contributions for the media, books or other journals and (ii) speeches or presentations made in the public domain, by departmental special advisers since March 2001; who in his Department authorised the activity; and on what date this activity was recorded with the departmental Head of Information. [72257]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 July, *Official Report*, col. 1373W.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals on fraud in the benefit system. [69738]

Malcolm Wicks: We set ourselves a firm Public Service Agreement target to make a 10 per cent. reduction in the level of fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance by March 2002. By September 2001 we had achieved a 24 per cent. reduction—more than double the target.

We have now announced an increase in our target for reducing fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance for working age customers by March 2004, from 25 per cent. to 33 per cent., and we maintain our longer-term commitment to a 50 per cent. reduction by March 2006. We have also announced a new target of a 25 per cent. reduction in fraud and error in Housing Benefit by 2006.

In April we introduced a range of measures using powers taken in the Fraud Act 2001 which will help us tackle fraudsters. For example, investigators can now request information from banks and utilities to find evidence of fraud and they have stronger powers to tackle employers who collude with their staff to defraud the benefit system. We now also have the power to remove benefits from those people who persistently abuse the system.

These new powers will help us continue our fight to make sure that the right benefits go to the right people. They are also sending out the clear message to fraudsters that they will not get away with it.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 96W, on disability living allowance, if he will give the same information for *(a)* the Argyll and Bute constituency and *(b)* Scotland; [73320]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column 96W, on disability living allowance, how many applicants whose initial claim for DLA was rejected in *(a)* the Argyll and Bute constituency, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the United Kingdom appealed against the rejection in each of the last five years. [73321]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the table. Information about appeals and unsuccessful claims is not available for individual constituencies or for Scotland.

Successful applications for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) over the last five years in the Argyle and Bute constituency and Scotland.

	First applications	*Successful on first application*	*Successful on review*
Argyle & Bute Constituency			
2000–01	*200	*100	—
2001–02	*500	*300	—
Scotland			
1997–98	27,100	19,600	5,100
1998–99	23,700	17,200	3,600
1999–2000	23,100	17,400	3,100
2000–01	27,400	20,700	2,000
2001–02	28,300	20,800	1,700

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures marked * are subject to a high degree of sampling variation.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Parliamentary constituency data is not available prior to 2000.

5 Figures for reviews include reconsiderations under the system of decision making and appeals introduced in October 1999.

Source:

Figures taken from the AA/DLA computer system between quarter ending May 2000 and February 2002, 5 per cent. sample.

Information about appeals against decisions on claims for Disability Living Allowance is not available for individual constituencies or for Scotland. For the figures for Great Britain, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 1 July, *Official Report*, col 96W. Information for Northern Ireland is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applicants for attendance allowance in *(a)* the Argyll and Bute constituency, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the United Kingdom (i) were granted on first application, (ii) were rejected on first application, (iii) appealed against rejection of first application, (iv) were granted on review and (v) were granted on appeal in each of the last five years. [73322]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the tables. Information about appeals and unsuccessful claims is not available for individual constituencies or for Scotland. Information for Northern Ireland is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Outcome of first applications for Attendance Allowance (AA) over the last five years in the constituency Argyle and Bute and Scotland.

	First applications	*Successful on first application*	*Successful on review*
Argyle & Bute			
2000/2001	600	500	—
2001/2002	*500	*500	—
Scotland			
1997/1998	32,800	28,800	3,300
1998/1999	29,400	26,700	2,000
1999/2000	29,900	27,300	2,100
2000/2001	30,400	28,500	800
2001/2002	28,200	25,900	1,000

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures marked * are subject to a high degree of sampling variation.
3. "—" Denotes nil or negligible.
4. Parliamentary constituency data is not available prior to 2000.
5. Figures for reviews include reconsiderations under the system of decision making and appeals introduced in October 1999.

Source:

Figures taken from the AA/DLA computer system between quarter ending May 2000 and February 2002, 5 per cent. sample.

Outcome of first applications for Attendance Allowance (AA) over the last five years in Great Britain.

	Successful on first application	*Unsuccessful on first application*
1997/1998	296,168	116,805
1998/1999	292,554	104,260
1999/2000	281,447	96,815
2000/2001	316,676	103,115
2001/2002	292,141	89,130

Sources:

ASD Information Centre 100 per cent. data taken from 100 per cent. extract of monthly management information system.

Figures taken from the AA/DLA computer system between quarter ending May 2000 and February 2002,5 per cent. sample.

Attendance Allowance appeals lodged at a first tier agency, cleared at the hearing and found in favour of the appellant in Great Britain.

	Received	*Lodged*	*Cleared at hearing*	*Found in favour*
1 July—31 December 2000	8,735	7,180	5,050	2,245
1 Jan—31 December 2001	12,055	11,870	10,800	5,030
1 January—31 August 2002	6,990	5,680	5,835	2,765

Notes:

1. All figures are subject to change. Figures relating to June 2002 onwards will rise significantly as information feeds through to the Appeals Service.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
3. Figures for 2002 are provisional.

Post Office

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary for Work and Pensions (1) whether he plans to allow applicants to open a Post Office account *(a)* in person at post office counters and *(b)* in writing; [74359]

(2) when Post Office accounts will be available. [74360]

Mr. McCartney: Customers who wish to open Post Office card accounts will need to discuss their account options with the relevant paying Department. They will then be given a letter to take to their Post Office branch where they will be issued with an application form. The Post Office plan to have available the card account from April 2003.

Pensioner Benefits

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the number of pensioners eligible for benefits and entitlements in *(a)* Paisley, North, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK. [73705]

Mr. McCartney: Such information as is available is shown in the table below. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are not available at constituency level.

Table 1: Figures for Paisley North, Scotland and Great Britain.

Benefit	*Total recipients*		
	Paisley North	*Scotland*	*GB*
State Pensions	11,200	911,000	11,147,400
Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG)	3,000	182,700	1,746,200
Attendance Allowance (AA)	1,700	129,200	1,291,400
Winter Fuel Payment (WFP)	12,430	996,420	11,201,895
Free TV licences (entitlement)	5,600	500,100	4,415,700
Council Tax Benefit	N/A	531,000	4,602,000
Housing Benefit	N/A	450,000	3,813,000

Sources:

MIG—Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 2002

State Pensions—Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample from the Pensions Strategy Computer System at 30 March 2002.

WFP—Figures from a 100 per cent. sample from the Winter Fuel Payment 2001/2002 Exercise

Free TV Licence—Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample from the Client Group analysis of the population over state pension age as at 30th November 2001.

Attendance Allowance—Figures from a 5 per cent. sample from the AA/DLA computer system as at February 2002

Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit—Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. caseload stock count taken in May 2002

Youth Unemployment (Paisley, North)

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many unemployed 16 to 18-year-olds are registered in Paisley, North; and if he will list the actions being taken to assist them into employment. [73667]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In August, there were 134 sixteen to eighteen-year-olds claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in the Paisley, North constituency, nearly 30 per cent. fewer than in the same month in 1997.

16 and 17-year-olds making a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance in Paisley, North are required to register with Careers Scotland and participate in a learning focused meeting with a Careers Adviser. Jobcentre Plus works in partnership with Careers Scotland by actively promoting the education, training and employment services Careers Scotland offers to young people.

18 year-olds making a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance are required to register with Jobcentre Plus and participate in a work-focused interview with a Personal Adviser. They will have access to the range of support provided through Jobcentre Plus to help them move into work.

We are building on the success of the New Deals in helping nearly three-quarters of a million people move from welfare to work. We are providing more help for

those who face the greatest barriers to work, providing more individually-tailored support, and engaging further with employers to ensure their needs are met. We are giving young people the skills, confidence and motivation to help them find work and improve their prospects of doing so.

Unclaimed Benefit

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the latest estimate is of unclaimed benefit in *(a)* Paisley, North, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK. [73672]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested for the Paisley, North constituency and for Scotland is not available.

Estimates of the number of families entitled to income related benefits but not claiming them in Great Britain are published in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take-Up". Copies of this annual publication are in the Library.

Information on other benefits is not available.

Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions; how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women reached state pension age in each year between 1995 and 2000 and (ii) are expected to reach state pension age in each year between 2006 and 2010. [74722]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Table 1: Number of men and women reaching state pension age between 1995 and 2000.

Year	*Men* Aged 65	*Women* Aged 60
1995	262,000	288,000
1996	265,000	294,000
1997	261,000	296,000
1998	252,000	301,000
1999	253,000	304,000
2000	260,000	299,000

Notes:
1. Figures are mid year estimates of men aged 65 and women aged 60 in the UK, rounded to the nearest 1,000.
Source:
1991 UK Census based annual mid-year population estimates, Office for National Statistics.

Table 2: Number of men and women reaching state pension age between 2006 and 2010.

Year	*Men* Aged 65	*Women* Aged 60
2006	256,000	350,000
2007	277,000	447,000
2008	302,000	412,000
2009	317,000	386,000
2010	314,000	373,000

Notes:
1. Figures are mid year estimates of men aged 65 and women aged 60 in the UK, rounded to the nearest 1,000.
2. No account has been taken of the change in female state pension age in 2010.
Source:
The Government Actuary's mid-2000 based Population Projections.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the possibility of making private and company pensions compulsory. [73767]

Mr. McCartney: Compulsion already exists in the pensions system. Most employees employed people are required to contribute to the Basic State Pension and, in the case of employees, to the State Second Pension unless they are contributing to a private pension and are contracted out of the state scheme.

We recognise the role pension providers play in encouraging individuals to save for a pension. The UK has a tradition of voluntary pension provision by employers and the implications of moving away from that would have to be considered fully before such a step was taken. We continue to believe that the best route for pension saving is via the employer and with the introduction of stakeholder pensions most employees have access to a good value pension at the workplace.

Benefits (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the number of pensioners eligible for benefits and entitlements in Portsmouth, South; and if he will make a statement. [73875]

Mr. McCartney: Such information as is available is shown in the table below. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are not available at constituency level. Estimates of the number of pensioners eligible for but not claiming the MIG are not available below national level. These figures are included in the publication "Take Up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999/2000", copies of which are available in the Library.

Table 1: Figures for Portsmouth South

Benefit	*Total recipients*
Minimum Income Guarantee	3,600
State Pension	17,000
Attendance Allowance	2,100
Winter Fuel Payment	17,700
Free TV Licence (entitlement)	6,700

Sources:
MIG—Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 2002
Figures marked"*" are subject to a high degree of sampling variation and should be used as a guide to the current situation only
State Pensions—Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample from the Pensions Strategy Computer System at 30 March 2002.
AA Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample from the AA/DLA computer system at 28 February 2002.
WFP—Figures taken from a 100 per cent. sample from the Winter Fuel Payment 2001/2002 Exercise
Free TV Licence—Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample from the Client Group analysis of the population over state pension age as at 30 November 2001.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of unclaimed benefits and entitlements in Portsmouth, South; and if he will make a statement. [73877]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

E-Applications (Benefits)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which benefit application forms *(a)* are available on the internet for download and *(b)* can be filled in on a computer screen; and how many electronic application forms have been submitted over the internet for each relevant benefit during the last 12 months. [74727]

Mr. McCartney: There are fifty-five benefit application forms available on the DWP Internet site for download, those marked *(b)* can be filled in on a computer screen.

There is only one application form that can be submitted over the internet, the BR19 Pension Forecast request. 25,000 people have submitted this form to date.

Benefit	*Form name*	
Attendance Allowance	DS2A (b) DS2A-print (a)	Claim pack
Back to Work Bonus	BTWB1 (b) BTWB1-print (a)	Claim form
Bereavement	BB1 (b) BB1-print (a)	
Child Benefit	CH2 (b) CH2-print (a)	
Child Maintenance Bonus	CMB1 (b) CMB1-print (a)	Claim form
Child Support Maintenance	CSA1 (b) CSA1-print (a)	Maintenance Application Form
Child Support Maintenance	CSA 150 (b)CSA 150-print (a)	Earnings details
Child Support Maintenance	CSA1 (TC) (b) CSA1 (TC)-print (a)	Tax Credits
Child Support Maintenance	CSA3 (b) CSA3-print (a)	Maintenance Enquiry Form
Child Support Maintenance	CSA3 (IS) (b) CSA3 (IS)-print (a)	Income Support
Child Support Maintenance	CSA3 (TC) (b) CSA3 (TC)-print (a)	Tax Credits
Child Support Maintenance	CSA6 (b) CSA6-print (a)	Request for information from the Mortgage lender
Disability Living Allowance	DLA1A (b) DLA1A-print (a)	Adult claim pack
Disability Living Allowance	DLA1A (b) DLA1A-print (a)	Child claim pack
Guardian's Allowance	BG1 (b) BG1-print (a)	Claim pack
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit	NHB1(CTB) (b) NHB1(CTB)-print (a)	Claim pack
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit	NHB1(HB) (b) NHB1(HB)-print (a)	Claim pack
Incapacity Benefit	IBY1 (b) IBY1-print (a)	Non-contributory IB claim form
Incapacity Benefit	SC1 (b) SC1-print (a)	Claim pack
Income Support	B16 (b) B16-print (a)	Self-Employed/Sub-contractor
Industrial Injuries	BI100A (b) BI100A-print (a)	Accident at work
Industrial Injuries	BI100B (b) BI100B-print (a)	Prescribed industrial disease
Industrial Injuries	BI100C (b) BI100C-print (a)	Chronic bronchitis etc
Industrial Injuries	BI100E (b) BI100E-print (a)	Allergic rhinitis
Industrial Injuries	BI100-OA (b) BI100-OA-print (a)	Occupational asthma
Industrial Injuries	BI100-OD (b) BI100-OD-print (a)	Occupational deafness
Industrial Injuries	BI100-PN (b) BI100-PN-print (a)	
Industrial Injuries	BI103 (b) BI103-print (a)	Reduced Earnings Allowance
Industrial Injuries	BI104 (b) BI104-print (a)	Constant Attendance Allowance
Industrial Injuries	BI95 (b) BI95-print (a)	We need some information
Invalid Care Allowance	DS700(1) (b) DS700(1)-print (a)	Claim form
Invalid Care Allowance	DS700(2) (b) DS700(2)-print (a)	Extra money for a child or adult
Maternity Allowance	MA1 (b) MA1-print (a)	Claim pack
Retirement Pension	BR1 (b) BR1-print (a)	Claim form
Retirement Pension	BR19 (b) BR19-print (a)	Pension Forecast Request Form
Social Fund	SF100(SM) (b) SF100(SM)-print(a)	Sure Start Maternity Grant
Social Fund	SF200 (b) SF200-print (a)	Funeral Payment
Social Fund	SF300 (b) SF300-print (a)	Community Care Grant
Social Fund	SF401 (b) SF401-print (a)	Crisis Loan
Social Fund	SF500 (b) SF500-print (a)	Budgeting Loan
Statutory Maternity Pay	SMP1 (b) SMP1-print (a)	Claim for Maternity pay
War Disablement Pension	WPA1 (b) WPA1-print (a)	WDP claim form
War Disablement Pension	WPA1C (b) WPA1C-print (a)	WDP Civilians & Civil Defence Volunteers
War Disablement Pension	WPA1M (b) WPA1M-print (a)	WDP Mercantile Marine
War Disablement Pension	WPA2 (b) WPA2-print (a)	WP Further Condition
War Disablement Pension	WPA3ALSO (b) WPA3ALSO-print (a)	Allowance for Lowered Standard of Occupation
War Disablement Pension	WPA3CAA (b) WPA3CAA-print (a)	Constant Attendance Allowance
War Disablement Pension	WPA3 CLOTHING (b) WPA3 CLOTHING-print (a)	Clothing Allowance
War Disablement Pension	WPA3WPMS (b) WPA3WPMS-print (a)	War Pensions Mobility Allowance
War Disablement Pension	WPA3 UNSUPP (b) WPA3 UNSUPP-print (a)	Unsupp Family
War Widows Pension	WPA4R (b) WPA4R-print (a)	WWP after 2 marriage
War Widows Pension	WPA4WWP (b) WPA4WWP-print (a)	Claim form
War Disablement Pension	WPA10 (b) WPA10-print (a)	Funeral expenses
War Disablement Pension	WPA12 (b) WPA12-print (a)	Review of WP
Winter Fuel	WF1 (b) WF1-print (a)	

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when and how the announcement to pay winter fuel payments to some people who have moved to a country within the European Economic Area was made; what steps his Department is taking to contact people who may be affected by the change; and what estimate has been made of the *(a)* annual and *(b)* one-off costs of the policy. [74711]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David) on 19 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 599w. The changes were publicised through a press release issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the media in relevant countries in Europe. In addition, we have taken steps to ensure that this information is available on the Department's website and in the new edition ot the Winter Fuel Payment leaflet, and have issued a factsheet to embassies in those countries affected. We will also be writing to people who have contacted the European Commission, claimed or recently enquired about Winter Fuel Payment for people who have moved to another EEA country or to Switzerland.

We estimate the ongoing cost to be around £10 million and the one-off cost to be around £3 million.

Occupational Diseases (Benefits)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's review of the schedule of occupational diseases for which benefits are paid will be published. [74247]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: No further findings have been published by the Council since the reply given to my hon. Friend on 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 857W.

Partnerships Against Poverty Group

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what organisations are represented on the Department's Partnerships Against Poverty Group; and what sub-groups have been established. [74719]

Malcolm Wicks: Partnerships Against Poverty was established in 2001. It is a joint initiative with the Local Government Association and voluntary organisations with the objective of working together to reduce poverty and tackle social exclusion amongst pensioners. There are two groups, one for England & Wales and another for Scotland which have specialist sub-groups for Black and Minority Ethnic elders and Pension Credit Implementation which feedback to both. In addition to DWP and LGA the following organisations are represented.

Age Concern
Age Concern Scotland
Alzheimer Scotland
Angus Council
Birmingham City Council
Chinese Community Centre
Citizens Advice Scotland
Confederation of Indian Organisations (UK)
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Cruse Bereavement Care
Dundee City Council
Durham City Council
Edinburgh City Council
Glasgow City Council
Federation of Irish Societies
Hackney Council for Older People
Help the Aged
Help the Aged Scotland
Jewish Care
London Irish Elders Forum
Milan (Senior Welfare Council)
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
National Pensioners Convention
Northern Ireland Social Security Agency
Royal National Institute of the Blind
Scotland Office
Scottish Executive
Scottish Local Authority Welfare Rights Advisors
South Lanarkshire Council
Stirling Council
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
The Poverty Alliance
Welsh Assembly
West of Scotland Seniors Forum
West Indian Standing Conference
West Lothian Council

Income-Related Benefit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the income-related benefit take-up figures for 2000–01 will be released. [74733]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: On 27 September 2001, we announced our intention to commission further research in order to better identify people who are eligible for income-related benefits, especially pensioners.

Estimates for income-related benefit take-up for 2000–01 will be published once this research has been concluded and evaluated. The publication date will be announced in due course in "Updates", the Office for National Statistics diary of statistical releases which is published monthly and placed in the Library.

Taunton

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many recipients of disability living allowance aged *(a)* over 18 years, *(b)* 16 to 18 years and *(c)* below 16 years there are in the Taunton constituency. [74097]

Maria Eagle: Recipients of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) by age in the Taunton Constituency at February 2002 are as indicated in the following table.

Thousands

	Recipients aged 0–15	*Recipients aged 16–18*	*Recipients aged 19 and over*
Taunton	*0.4	*0.1	2.9

Notes:
1. Figures are shown in thousands and rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures marked * are under 500 and are subject to a high degree of sampling variation and should only be used as a guide to the current situation.

Source:
ASD Information Centre from 5 per cent. sample at 28th February 2002

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals have been assisted in the Taunton One Stop offices since their opening. [74096]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There are 13 ONE sites in Somerset providing a one stop service in addition to the call centre in Taunton. Information is held for the Somerset pilot rather than for individual offices. Since the pilot became fully operational in April 2000 until July 2002, 70,491 customers have been assisted (ie have had at least one interview with a Personal Adviser), in ONE in Somerset.

New Deal

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps the Government have taken to encourage more employers to join the New Deal scheme. [74404]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have been successful in encouraging employers to support and participate in the New Deal. Over 99,000 employers have signed up to the New Deal and many more have taken on New Deal participants without signing up for the programme.

We recognise the central role employers have to play in achieving our goal of creating and sustaining employment opportunities for all, and we are continually seeking to involve employers even further in the New Deal.

This year we have taken steps to improve the flexibility of the New Deal to encourage employers to recruit more participants. For example, we have given employers more flexibility in the training they provide for New Deal clients. Employers can now give New Deal clients their own in-house training instead of having to offer external training which may not meet the needs of the job. Later this year we will be introducing "Recruit" into the New Deal for Young People. This will give small employers more payment flexibility in the Employment Option.

In August 2001, we appointed 140 Local Account Managers in Jobcentre Plus to help improve the services provided to employers and to engage with more employers to increase job opportunities.

The National Employment Panel (formerly known as the New Deal Task Force), which is an employer-led body, continues to provide Ministers with independent advice on the design, delivery and performance of the New Deals and our other welfare to work initiatives. The National Employment Panel Employer Coalitions ensure that employers can contribute to services at the regional and local level.

With the advice and guidance of the National Employment Panel, we have developed Ambition initiatives to help unemployed and disadvantaged people, including those on the New Deal, gain the right skills to meet the specific needs of employers in key sectors, such as retail, construction, energy and information technology. These initiatives are employer-led and developed to employer specifications.

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have found permanent employment as a result of New Deal for *(a)* long-term unemployed 25 plus, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* disabled people and *(d)* 50 plus, in each year since these schemes have been introduced. [73706]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the tables.

New Deal 25 plus

	Total number of people moving into sustained jobs
1998–99	10,010
1999–00	23,810
2000–01	22,010
2001–02	28,410
2002–03 (up to June 2002)	9,190

Note:
A sustained job in New Deal 25 plus is defined as one lasting more than 13 weeks.

New Deal for Disabled People

	Total number of people moving into sustained jobs
2001–02	245
2002–03 (up to July 2002)	706

Notes:
A sustained job in New Deal for Disabled People is defined as one lasting 26 weeks out of a 39 week period. New Deal for Disabled People was launched nationally in July 2001. Prior to that, pilots beginning in September 1998 had helped 8,242 people into jobs (sustained and unsustained).

Separate data for sustained jobs are not available for New Deal 50 plus or New Deal for Lone Parents. The figures for these programmes which follow therefore relate to all people moving into jobs.

New Deal 50 plus

	Total number of people moving into jobs
2000–01	33,020
2001–02	33,960
2002–03 (up to June 2002)	8,340

New Deal for Lone Parents

	Total number of people moving into jobs
1998–99	7,240
1999–00	38,300
2000–01	44,600
2001–02	46,920
2002–03 (up to June 2002)	15,170

Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

G8 Summit

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome for heavily indebted countries of the recent G8 summit. [73674]

Clare Short: At the Summit in Kananaskis, last July, the G8 leaders reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring the full financing of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. The G8 agreed to provide their share of up to an additional US$1 billion for the HIPC Trust Fund. This will help meet the current shortfall in the financing of the Initiative, and ensure that those countries whose debt positions have worsened because of the global economic slowdown and falls in commodity prices will get enough debt relief to enable them to exit the HIPC process with sustainable levels of debt.

At the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF held at the end of last month in Washington, the international community welcomed the continued progress made on the HIPC Initiative, and reconfirmed their commitment to its implementation and full financing. Some donors, including the UK took the opportunity to pledge their firm support for the HIPC Trust Fund. The UK announced a bilateral contribution of US$95 million plus its share of any EDF contribution to the Trust Fund. This is in addition to the US$306 million which we have already committed. Germany are contributing US$100 million and Sweden US$21 million. The US are considering a contribution of US$230 million, many other countries said they would announce their contributions later this month.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial target has been set for the Solidarity Fund on poverty in poorer countries agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development; how the Government intends encouraging voluntary contributions to the fund; and whether these will be from *(a)* business and *(b)* civil society. [74527]

Clare Short: The modalities of the world solidarity fund to eradicate poverty and promote social and human development will be determined by the General Assembly of the United Nations based on the Report of the Secretary-General of 2 July 2002. The Report of the Secretary-General recommends that,

"The world solidarity fund would receive voluntary contributions in cash and in kind from individuals, foundations, organisations and business sector enterprises and would not duplicate existing operational programmes and modes of intervention. It would not receive funding the effect of which would be to divert the flow of funding allocated to official development assistance."

No financial target has been set for the world solidarity fund. The Government does not intend to contribute to this fund and does not currently have any plans to encourage voluntary contributions. We do not believe that the creation of a new funding mechanism is the most appropriate and efficient way to increase the resources available for development. There are already too many development channels operating in developing countries. This places burdens on developing country administrations coping with the different demands and procedures of different aid delivery mechanisms.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the achievement of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in addressing commodity prices; and how this will relate to the 2015 millennium development goals. [74608]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, column 416W.

A major outcome of WSSD is that it reaffirmed many of the commitments made at recent global conferences, including New York, Doha and Monterrey. In particular the text agreed at WSSD endorsed the Doha commitment on issues to be considered in the new trade round. This sends a strong signal for the need to reduce perverse subsidies (such as agricultural subsidies) as well as other obstacles to development such as high tariffs, tariff peaks and tariff escalation.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the achievement of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in further debt cancellation in the developing world; and how this will relate to the 2015 millennium development goals. [74597]

Clare Short: At the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development, participants reaffirmed their commitment to reducing the debt burden of the poorest most indebted countries. The Summit supported the Monterrey Consensus on external debt, recognising the need for the speedy implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative and the full financing of the HIPC Trust Fund to help the Multilateral Development Banks meet their share of HIPC costs. Since then, at the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and IMF, Ministers stressed the urgency of meeting the financing shortfall, which could be up to US$1 billion, and called on donor countries to make firm pledges and contributions as soon as possible. Savings from debt relief are used towards the financing for the poverty reduction strategies that HIPC countries are developing with civil society and donors. However, debt relief alone, no matter how generous, cannot ensure that the Millennium Development Goals will be met. This will require substantial additional donor resources as well as other measures, such as improvement of health through the Global Fund to combat HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria, increasing the availability of education through higher quality and quantity of spending, and trade reform.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how the specific target reached on water and sanitation at the World Summit

on Sustainable Development will relate to existing policies on the 2015 millennium development goals.
[74607]

Clare Short: The World Summit on Sustainable Development placed poverty eradication at the heart of efforts to achieve sustainable development. The central focus of this Government's policy on international development, first set out in the White Paper on International Development in 1997 and reaffirmed in the second White Paper in 2000, is a commitment to the internationally agreed target to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, together with the associated targets including those relating to water and sanitation.

My Department's strategies for achieving the international development targets in the water sector are set out in the March 2001 paper "Addressing the Water Crisis—healthier and more productive lives for poor people". DFID has been at the forefront of efforts to promote international acceptance of the new sanitation target agreed internationally at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Better management of water resources, access to safe water and basic sanitation with hygiene promotion are key contributors to poverty reduction and other development objectives.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how the agreement made on trade at the World Summit on Sustainable Development will relate to the 2015 Millennium Development goals.
[74528]

Clare Short: The Plan of Implementation agreed at the World summit on Sustainable Development provided a strong reaffirmation of the agreement on a "development agenda" at the 4 Ministerial Conference of the WTO at Doha, Qatar. The commitments made in Doha and again at the WSSD can potentially generate significant benefits for developing countries. The Ministerial resulted in an agreement on the need to reduce (with a view to phasing out) subsidies and barriers to trade in agriculture. Agreement was also reached on continuing negotiations on service and commitment to tackle tariff peaks, high tariffs and tariff escalation as well as non-tariff barriers to manufactured goods. The declaration on TRIPS recognised the need for a flexible interpretation of TRIPS to enable developing countries to protect public health during crises such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic Southern Africa.

The outcome of Doha represents a real achievement for developing country negotiators. As a recent joint paper on Market Access by the World Bank and IMF points out, estimates of the welfare gains from eliminating barriers to merchandise trade, range between $250 billion and $620 billion annually with about one-third to one-half accruing to developing countries. This is several times what developing countries receive in development assistance.

However, this is not yet a Development Round – it is a development agenda and is only the beginning of negotiations. To make it a real Development Round we will need to work to ensure that these commitments made become a reality.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, when the Anglo-France €100 million fund to guarantee business ventures in developing countries agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development will be established; for how long will it operate; how businesses will be seconded; to whom it will be accountable; and how the fund will relate to the 2015 Millennium development Goals.
[74524]

Clare Short: There will be no single fund. DFID will use a number of facilities, some of which are in existence and some of which are now being developed, through which to channel our funds. The French propose, in the main, to use other channels for their inputs. We will, however, work to coordinate inputs at the country and project level. It is also hoped that we may be able to persuade the French to channel some of their funds to the mechanisms we are developing with others, through which DFID funds will be disbursed.

There is no finite life to the various facilities we are developing through which our funds will be disbursed, but we are planning to channel €100 million through these over the coming three years.

The involvement of the private sector at the fund level will vary from facility to facility. At the project level, the funds will help to partner and/or guarantee (depending on the facility) private sector investment to help mitigate risks and encourage increased private sector flows.

Copies of the joint statement by President Chirac and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, together with Annexes describing the British and French approach to the initiative, have been placed in the library of the House.

Caroline Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the changes she will make in her Department's *(a)* policies and *(b)* spending plans in response to the recent UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg
[74341]

Clare Short: The World Summit on Sustainable Development placed poverty eradication at the heart of efforts to achieve sustainable development. It brought together the agreements made at the Millennium Summit in September 2000, the Doha meeting of the World Trade Organisation in November 2001 and the Financing for Development Conference in Monterrey in March 2002. It integrated sustainability into the existing international agenda and added some important new targets, such as the target of halving the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015.

My Department will continue to focus on improving the effectiveness of the international development effort to reduce poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. My Department will work with other Government Departments for a round of trade negotiations focused on making the international trade system fairer to developing countries, and will work to ensure that the commitments made at Monterrey on increasing the levels, and improving the effectiveness, of official development assistance are delivered.

The agreement of a new target on access to basic sanitation should lead to effective implementation through sector wide support on sanitation. In addition,

water resource management, access to safe water, hygiene promotion and basic sanitation are key contributors to poverty reduction and other development objectives.

The spending plans of my Department have not changed as result of the World Summit. Following the recently announced 2002 Spending Review settlement, the UK's level of Official Development Assistance (ODA) will increase by £1.5 billion to reach 0.40 per cent. of national income by 2005–06. This is the highest UK ODA/GNI level for over twenty years, marks a 93 per cent. real terms increase since 1997 and represents significant progress towards meeting the UN target of an ODA/GNI ratio of 0.7 per cent. By 2005–06, we will also have more than met the target for aid volume set at Monterrey.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, when the Transparency Initiative on cooperation on anti-corruption in developing countries announced at the WSSD will be introduced; how many corporations have indicated a willingness to comply; how many firms will have to refuse to comply before the initiative becomes compulsory; and at what stage corrupt corporations delisting from the stock exchange would be sanctioned. [74596]

Clare Short: At the World Summit for Sustainable Development the Prime Minister announced a partnership of governments, companies, international development agencies and NGOs which would work together to develop an initiative to promote transparency of payments in resource extractive companies.

Natural resources are a vital asset for many developing countries and the global community has a responsibility to work together in order that the revenues generated by these resources are managed in an effective and transparent manner. The initiative aims to empower countries to make informed choices about their natural resource use in support of long-term sustainable development. This is intended to provide a virtuous circle of good governance, stability and investment that will benefit everyone.

At this stage the formal partners to the initiative are:

Governments: United Kingdom, Italy, Norway, Indonesia and The Central African Republic;

Resource extractive companies: BP, Shell, Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Anglo American;

NGOs: Global Witness, Tear Fund, The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and Save the Children;

Intergovernmental Institutions: World Bank and the UN

The partners have committed to develop a framework to promote transparency of payments from companies to host-country governments. This will help to improve government management of the revenue through their budget. Research currently being undertaken by the World Bank will provide the technical basis for the framework. Multi-stakeholder discussions are underway to develop a project strategy and timeline. We expect that the framework will be completed in the spring of 2003.

All options for achieving transparency will be considered, including both voluntary and mandatory approaches, and a decision taken by all partners to the initiative after a full appraisal of the evidence. This process is likely to cover many of the issues raised by the hon. Member.

The partnership is neither closed nor exclusive and the UK will be actively engaged in trying to bring other governments and civil society organisations on board. To this end preparations are underway to host an international meeting involving all existing and prospective partners to this initiative.

HIV/AIDS

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what future plans she has to help tackle HIV/AIDS in Southern African countries. [73693]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development is strongly committed to tackling HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa. We are working through national AIDS councils, and directly with ministries, civil society and the private sector. We are supporting efforts both to prevent the spread of the disease, and to care for those living with the disease and their families as well as children orphaned as a result of AIDS. Large new commitments to combat HIV/AIDS (totalling £71 million) include assistance to Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

As well as our specific support to HIV/AIDS initiatives, we aim to ensure that all our work in the region addresses the impact of HIV/AIDS, which affects every area of development.

Southern African countries will also benefit from access to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria to which we contribute, and from our work with international partners and the pharmaceutical industry to reduce the cost of medicines in lower income countries. Investments we have made in vaccine development and microbicides should also benefit Southern Africa in the future.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, how the Government plans to implement the Accord on Patents for drugs in poorer countries, with particular reference to HIV/AIDS drugs; and how this will relate to the recent Doha developments on patented drugs. [74606]

Clare Short: The Ministerial declaration on the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS) and Public Health agreed last November in Doha, recognised the need for a flexible interpretation of TRIPS to enable developing countries to protect public health.

The Doha Declaration was a major achievement, but the International Community have to meet their commitments if the declaration is to lead to an improvement in poor people's access to medicines. In particular, an effective and workable solution must be found to the problem of how developing countries with insufficient or no manufacturing capacities in the

pharmaceutical sector are to make effective use of compulsory licensing, by the agreed December 2002 deadline.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the process by which farm workers' organisations in the UN World Food Programme monitors those forced off farms in Zimbabwe; and what steps the Government are taking to meet their humanitarian needs. [70893]

Clare Short: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Millennium Development Goals

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if, as a result of the G8 talks, she estimates that the UK will be on target to meet the millennium development goals; and if she will make a statement. [73568]

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the most recent G8 meeting on the capacity of the UK Government to meet its millennium development goals; and if she will make a statement. [72987]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply I gave to the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) on 19 September 2002, *Official Report* column 415W.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if the United Kingdom is on target to meet its millennium development goals. [74141]

Clare Short: Latest forecasts from the World Bank suggest that globally, meeting the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 is attainable. There has been progress. The proportion of people living on less than $1 a day in the developing world fell from 29 per cent. in 1990, to 23 per cent. in 1999.

Progress has also been made against almost all the other 2015 Millennium Development targets. The proportion of children completing a full course of primary school increased from 68 per cent. to 73 per cent.; the under-five mortality rate decreased from 88 to 84 deaths per 1,000 births; and the proportion of people with access to an improved water source increased from 73 per cent. to 79 per cent.

However, to meet all of the Millennium Development Goals we must do more. The Sub-Saharan African region presents the biggest challenge to meeting the Goals. We therefore need to make an enormous effort internationally to accelerate progress in Africa. My Department is doing everything possible to help accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

A detailed description of progress towards all the Millennium Development Goals is contained in a recent World Bank publication: World Development Indicators 2002, which can be found at the following website:

http://www.worldbank.org/data/wdi2002/worldview.pdf.

Girls Education

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent action she has taken to help promote education for girls in developing countries. [73675]

Clare Short: Since 1997 we have committed over £700 million to support sustainable primary education programmes, with a strong focus on gender equality. Over the past year we have also worked with the UN Girls' Education Initiative to ensure stronger collaboration and coordination among donors, including the European Union, the UN system, the World Bank and other international financial institutions.

Drought

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance her Department is providing to the countries of Southern Africa affected by severe drought. [73673]

Clare Short: Since September 2001 we have committed £71.6 million in bilateral assistance for the humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa. In addition, the UK's share of assistance provided through the European Commission is about £17 million.

Famine

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what recent assistance *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the EU has provided to tackle famine in Southern Africa; and if she will make a statement. [74755]

Clare Short: Since September 2001, the UK has provided £71.6 million for food aid, logistical support and essential medicines for the six countries identified as having exceptional food shortages. As part of this effort we are also providing seeds and fertilisers to assist families to plant for the coming cropping season.

The EU has committed €148.5 million to the same six countries since January 2002. The UK share of this, which is additional to the £71.6 million commitment above, is about £17 million.

Debt Repayments

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will press for the immediate suspension of debt repayments under the HIPC initiative for *(a)* Malawi, *(b)* Mozambique and *(c)* Zambia [74525]

Clare Short: Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia – which are among the very poorest countries in the world – have all qualified for debt relief under the HIPC Initiative. Malawi and Zambia have reached Decision Point, and are already receiving debt relief. Mozambique has passed Completion Point and is now receiving full debt relief. These countries have completed a full poverty reduction strategy paper setting out how resources, including savings from debt

relief, will be spent, thereby ensuring the maximum possible impact on poverty reduction. To address the current food security problem in the region, the UK has provided £26.5 million in humanitarian relief to these three countries since September 2001.

Kiribati

David Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assistance her Department has given in the last five years to *(a)* education and *(b)* health projects in Kiribati. [73974]

Clare Short: 1. DFID has provided assistance in health and education to Kiribati in a number of different ways in the last 5 years. We:

(a) have strengthened the management and teaching capacity of the Tarawa Technical Institute. (£713,000)

(b) have provided advice on how best to strengthen the curriculum in primary schools, particularly in relation to English and the Kiribati language. (Visits from DFID advisers).

(c) have supported the very successful local development theatre group Te Itibwerere. This has enabled them to act as a medium for delivering a wide range of development messages for people of all ages. Topics include HIV/AIDS awareness, health and sanitation, domestic violence and environmental issues. (£240,000).

(d). are supporting Voluntary Services Overseas in a 2 year project (until March2004) to tackle HIV/AIDS and social education issues. The project will increase the impact and effectiveness of civil society and government responses to HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (£144,000).

2. The UK is also contributing to EC programmes in Kiribati. 12 million euros were allocation for the period 1995–2001. Interventions include an allocation of 1.6 million euros for a national training programme to provide in-country training to meet Kiribati's manpower needs and skills requirements. A second phase of the programme, costing 6.4 million euros, will be implemented to provide outer island adults and school leavers with the skills, needed for employment. This 5 year programme will also further strengthen the Tarawa Technical Institute and extend its activities to the outer islands. The health sector, particularly outer island primary health care, may become the focus for future cooperation between Kiribati and the EC under the Cotonou Agreement.

Bilateral Aid

Chris McCafferty: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list her Department's total expenditure to *(a)* UNFPA for 2001–02, *(b)* WHO Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1999–2000, (v) 2000–01 and (vi) 2001–02, *(c)* UNICEF (SRH) for (i) 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1999–2000, (v) 2000–01 and (iv) 2001–02, *(d)* UNAIDS for 2001–02, *(e)* IPPF for 2001–02, *(f)* MSI for (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1999–2000, (v) 2000–01 and (vi) 2001–02, *(g)* Population Concern for (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1999–2000, (v) 2000–01 and (vi) 2001–02, *(h)* IFH for (i) 1996–97, *(ii)* 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1999–2000, (v) 2000–01 and (vi) 2001–02, (i) bilateral aid by sector health (health and population)—including project, programme, technical, grants, humanitarian aid and CDC investments 2001–02 and *(j)* bilateral aid for sexual and reproductive health and rights—including project, programme, technical, grants, humanitarian aid and CDC investments for (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1999–2000, (v) 2000–01 and (vi) 2001–02. [74246]

Clare Short: The figures requested are set out in the two tables below. Details of sectoral funding to multilateral organisations is not held centrally and to provide it in the format requested would be at disproportionate cost. However total DFID funding to the relevant organisations has been provided:

£ thousand

Name	*2001/02*	*2000/01*	*1999/00*	*1998/99*	*1997/98*	*1996/97*
UNFPA	24,213	40,050	15,000	13,120	11,500	10,000
WHO	41,348	75,110	20,300	8,091	12,099	11,619
UNICEF	28,000	2,269	29,143	10,461	9,241	13,847
UNAIDS	3,052	3,000	3,000	2,750	2,300	3,500
IPPF	4,500	5,500	5,500	5,500	5,850	7,850
MSI	2,554	5,132	4,945	4,235	3,103	3,202
Population Concern	476	–	649	114	400	806
IFH	329	508	773	1,151	1,175	762

Bilateral Aid by Health & Population Sector

£ thousand

		Financial Aid (Excl ATP)					*Other Programmes*	
		Project or Sector Aid	*Programme Aid*	*Technical Cooperation*	*Grants and Other Aid in Kind*	*Humanitarian Assistance*	*Total DFID Programme*	*CDC Investments*
Health and Population	1997/98	21,435	25	59,723	37,871	954	116,758	683
	1998/99	27,826	0	59,475	46,846	551	134,698	0
	1999/00	36,011	0	75,058	50,295	6,744	168,108	0
	2000/01	53,799	0	78,819	50,080	1,509	184,217	6,145
	2001/02	55,779	0	100,016	33,756	64	189,616	7,794
of which								
Reproductive Health Care	1997/98	897	0	9,661	8,757	0	19,315	0
	1998/99	1,321	0	4,732	2,930	0	8,983	0

Bilateral Aid by Health & Population Sector

£ thousand

		Financial Aid (Excl ATP)					*Other Programmes*	
		Project or Sector Aid	*Programme Aid*	*Technical Cooperation*	*Grants and Other Aid in Kind*	*Humanitarian Assistance*	*Total DFID Programme*	*CDC Investments*
	1999/00	1,894	0	7,754	4,608	0	14,256	0
	2000/01	1,542	0	7,700	4,679	0	13,921	0
	2001/02	896	0	9,474	2,624	0	12,994	0
Family Planning	1997/98	1,237	0	8,922	6,212	0	16,371	0
	1998/99	919	0	7,202	15,282	0	23,402	0
	1999/00	520	0	8,826	12,173	0	21,519	0
	2000/01	2,493	0	12,824	12,016	0	27,333	0
	2001/02	2,554	0	11,767	10,433	0	24,754	0
STD Control Including HIV/ AIDS	1997/98	1,555	3	4,980	4,021	0	10,560	0
	1998/99	1,830	0	6,630	4,654	0	13,113	0
	1999/00	996	0	8,653	4,972	112	14,733	0
	2000/01	342	0	7,680	6,290	0	14,312	0
	2001/02	3,938	0	15,536	4,998	0	24,472	0

Notes:
These figures do not capture the full extent of our efforts in the health and population sector as they exclude expenditure on multisector projects, block funding to civil society organisations and general budget support.

Development Assistance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will provide a breakdown of the funding in *(a)* euros and *(b)* sterling equivalents, given by the Government in the last financial year in overseas aid, indicating the percentage and total of each that was expended (i) directly, (ii) through the United Nations agencies, (iii) through other international bodies, (iv) through the European Union and (v) through other means. [74274]

Clare Short: The figures requested on UK government spending on development assistance for 2001/02 are as follows;

	£ million	*€ million*	*% of Total Expenditure on Aid*
Total spent bilaterally	1,954	3,127	57
Total spent via United Nations Agencies	238	381	7
Total spent via European Commission	751	1,201	22
Total spent via International Financial Organisations	331	529	10
Total spent via Other International Organisations	48	77	1

Aid

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what means the European Court of Auditors has of examining the accounts of disbursing bodies of aid to developing countries in the relevant receiving states [74275]

Clare Short: The statement of Assurance sections of the Court of Auditor's Annual Report which relate to the External Actions budget lines and to the European Development Fund are based on an examination of representative random samples of contracts concluded by the Commission, drawn from the database and on payments made in the same year drawn from the Commission's central accounting system. The audit examines whether the transactions are legal and regular in accordance with the Financial Regulation. This work is supplemented by on the spot audits of transactions for which much of the documentary evidence is only available in the beneficiary countries. The Court of Auditors also examines the Commission's systems of procedures and controls to evaluate their theoretical and practical effectiveness.

Tsetse Control

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 25 February, what discussions she has had with the Pan African Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Campaign, the FAO and the Inter-African Bureau of Animal Resources on Tsetse control and eradication programmes; and if she will make a statement. [74194]

Clare Short: On 9 and 10 September 2002, DFID hosted a meeting in Edinburgh under the aegis of its Animal Heath Research Programme, entitled "Tsetse Control—the Next 100 Years". The meeting brought together representatives of over thirty stakeholder organisations to the Pan African Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Eradication Campaign (PATTEC), including DFID, senior officials of the Inter-African Bureau of Animal Resources, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the wider research community, the European Commission and PATTEC itself.

The Regional Co-ordinator of PATTEC, Dr. John Kabayo, has asked to meet DFID's Chief Natural Resources Adviser when he is next in London. Apart from this we are not aware of any formal request from PATTEC to hold discussions with bilateral donors, although we have made it clear that we would be pleased to discuss the campaign's preliminary proposals at a technical level.

DFID is in regular dialogue with the FAO's Animal Production and Health Division and with the Inter-African Bureau of Animal Resources through our ongoing programmes of support to those organisations. Neither has substantively raised the issue of PATTEC with us.

We remain unconvinced that the scientific and economic theories for the eradication of tsetse flies from Africa on which PATTEC's original proposals were founded are yet proven. Our view is that efforts should focus on tsetse and trypanosomiasis control rather than eradication for the foreseeable future. This is consistent with the consensus of the Edinburgh meeting and more recent statements by the Programme Against African Trypanosomiasis (PAAT) and by PATTEC.

Kurdistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on her Department's decision on funding a hospital project to treat the victims of biological and chemical weapons attacks in Kurdistan. [74557]

Clare Short: My Department recently decided not to fund such a project, for technical and strategic reasons.

Iraq

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, which UN agencies her Department supports are working in Iraq; and what level of financial commitment her Department makes to these programmes [74334]

Clare Short: The principal UN agencies working in Iraq with the Oil for Food Programme are UNDP, UNICEF, UNOPS, WFP, WHO, UNESCO, UNOCHI, UNHCR, FAO, UNIDO and Habitat. My Department does not give any of these agencies earmarked funding for their Iraq programmes, but supports most of them globally. In addition, the United Nations Guards Contingent for Iraq (UNGCI) is mandated to protect UN personnel, operations and assets involved in the humanitarian programme in Northern Iraq. As part of a joint donor effort, my Department is contributing £0.25 million in support of the UNGCI's work over financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what preparations her Department has made to deal with the humanitarian consequences of possible war in Iraq. [74338]

Clare Short: My Department does regular contingency planning for a variety of potential humanitarian emergencies around the world, and maintains constant preparedness to respond to such [illegible]

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what arrangements are in place for consultation between her Department and the Ministry of Defence before any plans for war against Iraq are agreed. [74340]

Clare Short: My Department consults regularly with the Ministry of Defence on a range of issues at official and ministerial level.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assistance her Department provides to *(a)* refugees, *(b)* women and *(c)* children in Iraq, broken down by region. [74336]

Clare Short: My Department is providing assistance for Iraqi refugees in Iran through AMAR International; for internally-displaced people in Northern Iraq through Response, Relief, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (4RS); for women in Northern Iraq through a 4RS income-generating project; and for children in Northern Iraq through Save the Children-UK and ACORN. In addition, other NGO activities funded by my Department in both Northern and Central/Southern Iraq include women and children among their beneficiaries.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what her Department's strategy is for providing humanitarian relief to the people of Iraq. [74333]

Clare Short: The purpose of my Department's humanitarian programme in Iraq is to reduce suffering among the Iraqi people. The programme supports and complements the UN's Oil for Food Programme by working with NGOs and other international organisations.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment her Department has made of the obstruction of humanitarian relief and levels of human rights abuses committed by Saddam Hussein against the Iraqi people. [74337]

Clare Short: My Department monitors this situation through information obtained from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other sources, which was most recently summarised in part 3 of the dossier: "Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government".

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what discussions her Department has had with colleagues in *(a)* the European Union, *(b)* the United States and *(c)* the UN of the humanitarian impact of a possible war in Iraq. [74339]

Clare Short: My Department is not actively discussing these issues with EU, US and UN colleagues at the moment.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assessment her Department has made of the performance of the oil for food programme in providing humanitarian relief for the people of Iraq. [74335]

Clare Short: My Department has monitored information made available by the UN Office for the Iraq Programme on the operation of the Oil for Food (OFF) Programme, and by other UN agencies such as UNICEF on the impact of the OFF on humanitarian indicators. Our assessment is that since the introduction of the OFF in 1996, the declining humanitarian situation in central/southern Iraq has at best only been halted, although indicators have generally improved in

the north. The long term impact of sanctions has contributed to a high dependence by many Iraqis on the OFF food ration.

Consultancy Contracts

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will list external *(a)* public relations/ commercial companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by her Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within her Department; and what cost have been incurred through use of these consultancies/ companies. [74683]

Clare Short: Information in the format requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost but DFID has let consultancy contracts to a value of approximately £300 million in 2001–2002.

World Bank Group

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if, when carrying out her functions as Governor of the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank Group, she has sole responsibility for instructing the UK Executive Director as to how to exercise the UK's vote on the board of the IFC; which other departments are involved in this role; and if she will make a statement; [74579]

(2) what guidelines exist concerning the manner in which instructions are given to the UK Executive Director as to how to exercise the UK's votes on the Board of the International Finance Corporation or on the Board of other of the World Bank Group institutions; if she will place such material in the library; and if she will make a statement. [74578]

Clare Short: My Department is responsible for the UK Government's relations with the World Bank Group, including the International Finance Corporation (IFC). We are represented on the Boards of the World Bank Group by the UK Executive Director or members of his staff in the UK Delegation to the World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund in Washington. The UK Executive Director and his team take instructions from my department and receive guidance from, liaise closely with and report fully to my department and, as appropriate, other interested Whitehall departments and the Bank of England.

All papers for consideration by the IFC Board are received by the UK Delegation and forwarded to DFID officials in London who consider these on the basis of agreed Government policy. If any issues arising in the papers appear controversial or are of particular interest, officials bring these to my attention or to the attention of other relevant government departments.

The majority of papers are uncontroversial and we are content to support the recommendations of IFC management. Where necessary, DFID officials provide briefing and points for the UK Delegation to make in the Board discussion. As with the rest of the World Bank Group, nearly all Board decisions are taken on the basis of consensus, to reflect Board discussions, and decisions rarely go to direct votes.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of dangerous substances and preparations is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66418]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of Directive 76/769/EEC on the restrictions on the Marketing and Use of Dangerous Substances and Preparations is expected to meet again later this year. UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations where there are items of sufficient interest. Members of the Scottish Executive have not attended any meetings so far, although as with other Committees of this type, discussion with them and the other devolved administrations is a continuous process during development of the UK position.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods with non-member countries is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [71837]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The Committee on Statistics relating to the trading of goods with non member countries is due to meet on 14 and 15 November 2002.

The legal basis for the collection of statistics relating to the trading of goods with non member countries is Council Regulation (EC) No 1172/95, which requires that statistics are collected on a UK wide basis.

The UK is normally represented by two officials from HM Customs and Excise. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have never been and are not members of the Committee.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods between member states is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [71832]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The Committee on Statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States is due to meet on 14 and 15 November 2002.

The legal basis for the collection of statistics relating to the trading of goods between Member States is Council Regulation (EEC) No 3330/91, which requires that statistics are collected on a UK wide basis.

The UK is normally represented by two officials from HM Customs and Excise. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have never been and are not members of the Committee.

Telecommunications Masts

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she takes to monitor the installation of mobile telephone masts; and what steps she has taken to implement recommendation 1.37 of the Stewart report. [73369]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not routinely monitor the installation of mobile phone masts.

Recommendation 1.37 of the Stewart report proposed that, at national Government level, a template of protocols be developed, in concert with industry and consumers, which can be use to inform the planning process and that it should be assiduously and openly followed before the granting of permission for the siting of a new base station.

On 22 August last year, taking into account the recommendations in the Stewart Report published in May 2000 and following public consultation, the Government introduced changes that significantly improved the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast development. The changes:

strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below so that they are the same as for planning applications

increased the time for an authority to deal with prior approval applications to 56 days

underlined that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college; and

increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has taken to ensure that local authorities maintain a mast register of local installations; and how many local authorities have such a register. [73370]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's existing Code of Best Practice advises that local planning authorities should maintain a mast register of local installations. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently revising the Code of Best Practice.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not monitor how many local planning authorities have such registers.

The Radiocommunications Agency has made information available to the public about existing mobile phone masts via their website (www.radio.gov.uk). The database, called "Sitefinder", gives map-based details about all operational mobile phone base stations and their emissions.

Microsoft

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the level of faults found in Microsoft products used by the UK Government in the last five years. [73826]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally.

Your Guide

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether a Your Guide service will be rolled out nationally following a pilot of the concept in Leicestershire and Rutland between July 2001 and March 2002. [74663]

Mr. Timms: The pilot showed that Your Guide was popular but that its impact was limited. It would neither significantly improve Government Departments' ability to meet their objectives nor generate a viable level of income for Post Office Limited and its branches. A publicly funded Your Guide scheme would not therefore represent value for money and we have concluded that it should not be rolled out nationally.

However, Your Guide has highlighted the potential for Government Departments to deliver services through post offices in future. There is also significant commercial interest in placing kiosks in post offices. A commercial kiosk service, based on kiosks in retail outlets—including some sub-post offices—is expected to be piloted in Cornwall from next year.

British Energy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* meetings and *(b)* discussions between her Department and third parties have taken place at which the future of members of the board of British Energy has been discussed. [74366]

Ms Hewitt: Appointments to the board of British Energy are a matter for the company and its shareholders.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the terms of the financial facility granted to British Energy that is due to expire on 27 September. [74377]

Ms Hewitt: On 9 September 2002 the Government agreed to provide British Energy with a loan for up to £410 million in respect of its working capital requirements and cash collateral for trading in the UK and North America. This short-term loan was put in place until 27 September. On the 26 September the Government agreed to extend the loan until 29 November and increase it from £410 million to up to £650 million as well as taking security for the loan over British Energy's assets.

Full details of the agreement are commercially confidential unless and until it is made public by British Energy.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was first made aware of the statement to the Stock Exchange made by British Energy on 5 September 2001. [74365]

Ms Hewitt: The Executive Chairman of British Energy, Robin Jeffrey, wrote to me on 4 September to inform me that the company's position was so critical that it had to consider whether or not it could continue to meet its obligations as they fell due. The possibility of a statement was raised in that letter. My officials met with the company on 4 and 5 September; the company decided to make a statement to the Stock Exchange at its Board meeting shortly after the meetings with my officials. My Department was made aware of the terms of the statement shortly before it was announced.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the position of British Energy. [74804]

Ms Hewitt: On 4 September, Robin Jeffrey, the Chairman of BE informed me that the company was considering whether or not it could continue to meet its obligations and sought to initiate discussions over possible funding. On 5 September BE announced that it had initiated discussions with the Government about possible immediate financial support and to enable a longer term restructuring to take place. My Department issued a separate statement on that day confirming that these discussions had started. BE's statement also said that if discussions over financial support were not successful

"the company may be unable to meet its financial obligations as they fall due and therefore the company may have to take appropriate insolvency proceedings".

The Government's overriding objectives are to ensure the safety of BE's nuclear plant and security of electricity supplies while protecting the interests of the taxpayer. My assessment was that immediate and sudden insolvency proceedings could pose a serious risk to nuclear safety and security of supply. It is essential for the safe operation of BE's nuclear power stations that the company has access to sufficient resources for it to fulfil its obligations under the nuclear, environmental and commercial regulatory regimes under which it operates. We have also been in discussions with the industry regulator, Ofgem about the risks that an unplanned shut-down of BE's plant may pose to security of supply.

Having regard to nuclear safety and security of supply, I decided with the agreement of the Treasury to provide BE on 9 September with a loan of up to £410 million in respect of its working capital requirements and cash collateral for trading in the UK and North America. This was a short-term loan, for the period until 27 September pending clarification of the company's financial position. No commitment was given about support beyond that period.

During that initial period it became clear that it would not be possible to have a full understanding in detail of the company's position in a way that would enable choices to be made about future restructuring options. Following discussions with the company and its advisers, and in agreement with the Treasury, on 26 September I announced an extension to the loan, now increased in value up to a maximum of £650 million. The loan has been extended until 29 November in order to give sufficient time to clarify the company's full financial position and to come to a clear view on the future options for the company.

In agreeing and extending the loan I have sought to build in the greatest safeguards to the taxpayer. The loan is cross-guaranteed by the BE group as a whole, and is backed by security given by BE plc and its principal subsidiaries. In administering the loan we have set out strict criteria and operational arrangements which are being managed by our accountancy advisers, Deloitte and Touche.

In view of the urgency in this case, we have sought and obtained from HM Treasury a Contingencies Fund advance of £500 million to finance the loan, and subsequently a further advance of £150 million to fund the extension of the support. It is my intention to seek Parliamentary approval for the loan through a Winter Supplementary Estimate in order to provide the authority for this loan and hence repay the Contingencies Fund. It was not possible to give the House advance warning of the need to use the Contingencies Fund. The case was urgent and I judged it would clearly be contrary to the public interest to delay expenditure until Parliamentary approval to the Supplementary Estimate could be given, in view of the risks that immediate and sudden insolvency posed to nuclear safety and security of supply. The urgent need for the loan and extension were, however, communicated to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

These arrangements have been given in compliance with the European Commission rules on Rescue and Restructuring aid and have been notified to the European Commission as rescue aid. EU State Aid rules normally require that within a period of 6 months from the authorisation of rescue aid that aid is either repaid or a restructuring plan is submitted to the Commission. We have indicated to the Commission that we intend to comply with these conditions.

At this stage, no decisions have been taken on the future of BE and no commitments given. But whatever the outcome at the end of this period the Government will continue to act to achieve its objectives of nuclear safety, security of supply while protecting the interests of the taxpayer. I recognise the key ongoing role played by employees and suppliers who are providing goods and services essential to the safe management of the UK nuclear power stations.

I will keep the House informed of future developments.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was first informed that there were concerns about the financial viability of British Energy. [74364]

Ms Hewitt: Earlier this year, British Energy gave my Department information on some aspects of its financial position. The Executive Chairman, Robin Jeffrey wrote to me on 4 September to inform me that the company's position was now so critical that it had to consider whether or not it could continue to meet its obligations as they fell due.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the income received by British Nuclear Fuels Limited from its reprocessing contract with British Energy. [74371]

Ms Hewitt: Details of commercial contracts are a matter for the two companies.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is her Department's policy to seek to require any successor body to British Energy to enter into a contract for reprocessing waste with British Nuclear Fuels Limited. [74372]

Ms Hewitt: No decisions have been taken and no commitments given on British Energy's long term future at this time.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* meetings and *(b)* discussions between her Department and British Energy have taken place in which (i) the relationship between British Energy and British Nuclear Fuels Limited and (ii) the Climate Change Levy were raised. [74367]

Ms Hewitt: My Department holds regular meetings with British Energy at which a wide range of issues is discussed.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact on the Government's *(a)* expenditure and *(b)* liabilities in the event of British Energy being placed in administration. [74376]

Ms Hewitt: The Government has provided British Energy with a loan facility of up to £650 million until 29 November. The impact on expenditure and liabilities in the event of British Energy being placed in administration would depend upon the circumstances at the time. No decisions have been taken and no commitments given on British Energy's long term future at this time.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports her Department has received from the Financial Services Authority into British Energy; and if she will place a copy of such reports in the Library. [74374]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has not received any reports from the Financial Services Authority into British Energy.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* meetings and *(b)* discussions have taken place between her Department and shareholders in British Energy at which British Energy has been discussed. [74368]

Ms Hewitt: No such meetings or discussions have taken place.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact on the Government's policy of managing the nuclear legacy of British Energy being placed into administration. [74382]

Ms Hewitt: No decisions have been taken and no commitments given on British Energy's long term future at this time.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the costs in this financial year to British Energy of the Climate Change Levy. [74378]

Ms Hewitt: My Department's advisers are looking at all aspects of British Energy's costs and revenues in order to clarify the company's full financial position.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* banks and *(b)* other companies in the financial sector with which her Department has had discussions about British Energy in the last 12 months. [74370]

Ms Hewitt: My Department regularly meets with various banks and other companies in the financial sector to discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact on British Nuclear Fuels Limited of British Energy being placed in administration. [74373]

Ms Hewitt: No decisions have been taken and no commitments give on British Energy's long term future at this time.

Energy White Paper

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish the Energy White Paper. [74363]

Ms Hewitt: I plan to publish the Energy White Paper in the new year.

European Agency Workers Directive

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the cost to the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sectors of the proposed European Agency Workers Directive. [74519]

Ms Hewitt: The Government is currently consulting UK business, unions and others on the impact of the proposed directive. We remain concerned that, as currently drafted the proposed directive would impose disproportionate cost and administrative burdens on business, and would reduce routes into employment for many workers. Our initial estimate of the cost to user undertakings of the proposed Temporary [Agency] Workers Directive, as currently drafted, is in the range from £250 million to £402 million, as stated in the Regulatory Impact Assessment, which is available in the Libraries of the Houses. It is estimated that 21 per cent. of these costs would be borne by the public sector and 79 per cent. by the private sector. In addition, it is estimated that there are costs in the range of £80 million to £194 million which would be borne by private sector employment agencies.

Broadband Services

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many households have access to broadband services in *(a)* Paisley, North and *(b)* the UK, expressed as a percentage of the population. [73676]

Mr. Timms: Almost all households in the UK can receive broadband through satellite technology. 63 per cent. currently have access via ADSL, with 43 per cent. having access via cable modem. Around 67 per cent. of the population has access via one or both of ADSL and/or cable modem.

A map showing geographical availability of broadband services can be found in the UK Online Annual Report (http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/oee/oee.nsf/sections/reports-anrep2001-images/$file/fig01.pdf).

The Government does not compile figures for broadband connections broken down into individual constituencies.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of households have access to broadband services in Portsmouth, South; and if she will make a statement. [73873]

Mr. Timms: A map showing geographical availability of broadband services can be found in the UK Online Annual Report (http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/oee/oee.nsf/sections/reports-anrep2001-images/$file/fig01.pdf).

The Government does not compile figures for broadband connections broken down into individual constituencies.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* homes and *(b)* businesses in the United Kingdom have broadband Internet access by (i) cable modem and (ii) ADSL; and if she will make a statement. [74386]

Ms Hewitt: Oftel's figures of September 2002, available on their website, reported that there were over 885,000 end users of broadband in the United Kingdom, of which over 490,000 were served by cable modem and 390,000 by ADSL. Since then, they have announced on 8 October that there are now in excess of one million users.

Around 14 million homes can receive DSL services and 13.3 million can receive cable modem. No recent data for numbers of businesses with broadband access are readily available.

Correspondence

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to reply to the letter of 25 July from the hon. Member for Nottingham North regarding Nottingham S.M.E.E. Ltd. of Annon Court, Nottingham. [74741]

Ms Hewitt: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Science and Innovation, Lord Sainsbury replied on Friday 27 September 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to reply to the letter to her dated 16 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. T. Walsh. [74570]

Ms Hewitt: I replied on 24 September.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how she determines whether a letter from *(a)* a member of the public and *(b)* an hon. Member receives a reply personally signed by (i) her, (ii) other ministers in her Department and (iii) her officials. [74592]

Ms Hewitt: I aim to reply personally to as many letters as I can but it is not possible to do this for all letters because of the large volume of correspondence addressed to me.

Hon. Members receive replies from me, or other Ministers in my Department if the subject matter is one in which they have been closely involved.

From time to time, when I am out of London, I will authorise my Private Office to sign letters on my behalf and other Ministers will do the same in their offices.

Letters from members of the public are frequently delegated to an official to answer, in order to ensure that replies can be sent quickly.

Radioactive Material

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what account she has taken of the events of 11 September 2001 in formulating her policy on the number of movements of radioactive material. [73952]

Mr. Wilson: Overall policy responsibility for the transport of radioactive material lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. Security for the transportation of nuclear material is regulated by the Office for Civil Nuclear Security (OCNS), the security regulator. Security precautions for the transportation of nuclear material are kept under regular review. OCNS has reviewed all relevant precautions in the light of the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken in connection with nuclear material.

BNFL

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she takes to ensure that the conduct of BNFL and its subsidiaries is consistent with Government policy, with particular reference to employment practices. [73951]

Mr. Wilson: HMG sets the overall strategic direction for the company, but the day-to-day management is a matter for the Board. BNFL like all companies must comply with relevant employment laws. It is the job of BNFL management to ensure adherence to those laws.

Renewable Energy Sources

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the reasons underlying the change in the percentage of energy used derived from renewable sources in the last 12 months. [73949]

Mr. Wilson: Total electricity generation from renewables and wastes in 2001 amounted to 10,099 GWh, 38 per cent. of which was from large scale hydro generation. Large scale hydro generation was 21 per cent. lower than in 2000 because of a low level of precipitation in the catchment areas, especially in winter 2000–01. As a result, renewable sources provided 2.6 per cent. of the electricity generated in the United

Kingdom, 0.2 percentage points lower than in 2000. Generation from renewable sources other than hydro in 2001 was 12 per cent. higher than in 2000.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the UK will meet the target of 5 per cent. of electricity to be generated by renewable sources by 2003. [73810]

Mr. Wilson: As I explained in introducing the Renewables Obligation Order 2002 on 6 March, (Third Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, column 4), prospects of achieving a level of 5 per cent. by the end of 2003—a date proposed in a 1999 DTI consultation document—have been heavily dependent on the pace of new commissioning of projects awarded contracts under the Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) and the comparable arrangements for Scotland. In practice, even with the Government's action to allow locational flexibility for NFFO contracts, the pace of new commissioning has been somewhat slower than had been hoped. As I said in March, the indications are that the target of a 5 per cent. contribution from renewables to electricity supplies will be delivered late.

The Renewables Obligation, which came into effect from 1 April 2002, introduces new arrangements to ensure the long-term expansion of renewable energy in the UK. The Obligation is set to run for twenty-five years, and will provide an incentive for renewable energy expected to rise to some £1 billion per year by 2010–11. It is backed by £260 million direct Government support for renewables over the next three years. The Obligation is set at increasing levels for successive years, rising from 3 per cent. for 2002–3 to 10.4 per cent. for 2010–11. The level of the Renewables Obligation is 4.9 per cent. for 2004–5 and 5.5 per cent. for 2005–6.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress with increasing the share of renewable energy sources in the UK's electricity production in the last 12 months. [73811]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to my reply earlier today to the hon. Member for Lewes.

The capacity to generate electricity from renewable sources increased by 2.9 per cent. in 2001 to stand at 2.52 MW at the end of December 2001. As a result of new projects coming fully on-line under NFFO during 2001, generation from landfill gas increased by 14½ per cent. and generation from other biofuels (especially straw and poultry litter) increased by 63 per cent.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of electricity is derived from renewable sources. [73891]

Mr. Wilson: In 2001, renewable sources provided 2.6 per cent. of the electricity derived in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the progress of the Government towards meeting its target of acquiring 10 per cent. of power from renewable sources. [73766]

Mr. Wilson: The Department collects regular statistical data on the output of different forms of energy including renewables.

The forthcoming Energy White Paper will assess in full our prospects for achieving the 10 per cent. target.

Renewable Energy

Bob Spink: To ask the Minister for Women what estimate she has made of the level of new conventional electricity generating plant needed to back up the anticipated increase in wind turbine and other climate-dependent renewable energy sources. [74398]

Mr. Wilson: Every electricity system has to have some spare capacity to deal with peaks and troughs in demand. To a considerable extent, this inbuilt flexibility also enables an electricity system to cope, without significant additional cost, with a proportion of intermittent supply alongside a proportion of non-intermittent supply.

I refer the hon. Member to the Appendix to Chapter 7 of the Energy Review produced by the Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office (PIU) in February 2002. This reports the outcome of a survey conducted for the PIU on costs associated with intermittent generation.

The consultants employed by the PIU found that, as a rough rule of thumb, while the share of electricity supplies contributed by intermittents (for example, wind energy) remained below about 5 per cent., the system costs would be insignificant. With a share between 5 per cent. and 10 per cent., they estimated that costs might start to rise to about 0.1p/kWh. Costs would continue to increase beyond 10 per cent., perhaps rising to about 0.2p/kWh, should intermittents provide 20 per cent. of electricity.

We are considering the PIU's conclusions, as well as responses to our consultation on energy policy, as we develop the forthcoming Energy White Paper. Work is being undertaken, in particular, to improve our understanding of the complete spectrum of network-related costs arising as the share of supplies provided by intermittents rises above 10 per cent.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action her Department is taking to increase access to export credit assistance for overseas renewable energy projects; and if she will make a statement. [74500]

Ms Hewitt: The Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) have recently launched an initiative to stimulate and facilitate exports of renewable energy sector goods and services to emerging markets. This Renewables Initiative was announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 2 September 2002 in Mozambique on his way to the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development.

From April 2003, ECGD will make available cover for at least £50 million of exports each year for projects in the renewables sector which meet its minimum risk standards. ECGD will also support the DTI's Trade Promoters' outreach programme to stimulate exports of renewable energy goods and services to emerging

markets. These activities form part of the Government—wide drive to encourage the development of power generation from renewable resources.

It is hoped that this initiative will:

Encourage UK entrepreneurs to develop and then export renewable energy goods and services and to offer them insurance against the risks of nonpayment;

Assist more overseas countries to meet their power generation requirements in a sustainable way by providing finance at attractive commercial rates linked to UK involvement;

Slow down the onset of, and possibly reduce the impact of, climate change resulting from greenhouse gas generation.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value of export credit assistance given by her Department and associated non-departmental public bodies for renewable energy projects was in each of the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [74499]

Ms Hewitt: The figures for the years in which ECGD has supported renewable energy projects since 1992 are as follows:

Year	*Business Amount £ Million*
1993/94	7.8
1994/95	17.1
1995/96	7.7
1996/97	1.4
1997/98	6.4

Sustainable Development

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations the Government will make on a timetable to phase in a substantial increase on renewable energy agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development; and how this will relate to the 2015 millennium development goals. [74619]

Mr. Wilson: At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Government supported the European Union proposal that renewables should contribute 15 per cent. of total energy use by 2010, but, in the event, no specific timetable for the expansion of renewables was agreed. All parties nevertheless accepted the urgent need to increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global mix.

The Government's Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) will help developing countries limit greenhouse gas emissions by making available at least £50 million of cover for creditworthy exports from April 2003 in the renewable energy sector. The ECGD will participate in an outreach programme, run by DTI's Trade Promoters and the private sector, to stimulate exports of renewable energy goods to emerging markets to help overcome the low level of renewables applications.

The UK initiated the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP), which aims to foster international collaboration in order to accelerate the growth of markets in modern renewables and energy efficiency, so as to lower costs and facilitate the removal of other policy, technology, market and regulatory barriers. We launched this in Johannesburg, and in the coming months the UK Government shall be working to develop this in conjunction with other partners including the Governments of Brazil, Indonesia, Italy, Japan and New Zealand, as well as Shell, the UK Business Council for Sustainable Energy and WWF. The REEEP will work to keep renewable energy and energy efficiency high on the global political agenda.

The Government's renewable energy policy will contribute to section IV of the United Nations Millennium Declaration "Protecting our common environment", to support sustainable development, reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and lessen the threat that diminishing resources will no longer meet the needs of future generations. As the REEEP objective for lowering the costs of renewable energy is achieved, renewable energy technologies will become more affordable energy options for the poor. This will contribute towards improving access to energy services, which is important to achieving the Millennium Development Goals including the halving of global poverty by 2015.

Domestically, the Government has set a target of obtaining 10 per cent. of our electricity from renewable sources by 2010. Sourcing 10 per cent. of electricity from renewable sources could result in annual savings of around 2.5 million tonnes of carbon emissions by 2010. The Renewables Obligation, which came into force on 1 April 2002, will provide the driving force for the expansion of renewable energy in the UK. Licensed electricity suppliers will be required to obtain specified proportions of their electricity from renewable sources. The proportion will rise each year to reach the 10 per cent. target by 2010.

Increasing the market share of renewable energy is currently being considered in the context of the work being undertaken for the Government's forthcoming White Paper on the UK's future energy policy. This will be published around the start of 2003.

Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will publish the results of her Department's review of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 and the submissions which were made to that review; [73751]

(2) if she will make a statement on the outcome of her meetings with enforcement authorities, industry representatives and others, to discuss improved enforcement of the Furniture and Furnishing (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, indicating the dates of those meetings and the organisations represented at them. [73752]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Last year the Department consulted with a wide range of interested parties about the effectiveness of the Regulations. I looked carefully at the results and concluded that their main concern was on improving the enforcement of the Regulations.

To take matters forward I held two meetings with representatives from enforcement and industry.

I was very encouraged by the progress made in both meetings. Enforcement is the key issue to ensure that consumers can be confident that the furniture they buy meets UK safety standards.

EU Structural Funds

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the Government's policy is towards re-nationalisation of parts of the EU Structural Funds post 2006; [73992]

(2) if the Government will bring forward proposals for a stronger urban dimension to future EU regional policy; [73991]

(3) what the Government's policy is towards the development of a stronger EU regional policy for *(a)* new and *(b)* current member states after 2006; [73995]

(4) if she will make it her policy that a similar amount of money to that received by UK regions in 2000 to 2006 would be made available by national Government for comparable purposes if EU regional policy was renationalised. [73993]

Alan Johnson: Although the debate on the future of European cohesion policy post-2006 has already started, very few national governments have so far committed themselves to a particular position. The Government intends to play a full part in this debate and we will shortly be launching a consultation to inform our position.

The debate has to be seen in the context of the Government's objective to improve regional and national economic performance. Following the 2002 spending review, the Government agreed a new focus for regional policy: to improve the economic performance of all regions and over the long term to reduce the persistent gaps in growth rates between them. The Government is committed to pursuing the necessary policies to achieve this target.

A key issue informing the Government's position in the debate will be the added value of the Structural Funds i.e. the extent to which this source of funding has delivered benefits over and beyond those which could have been achieved through national measures. We are collaborating with other Departments and the Devolved Administrations on research into this and other issues.

Cohesion policy has always been focused on the poorest parts of the EU and the forthcoming enlargement will therefore require a fundamental review of the policy and its application. It is clear that in future there must continue to be transfers from the richer states to the poorer, and in particular to the candidates currently negotiating for accession. However, it is too early to draw any conclusions about the overall size of the Structural Funds budget, the priorities it should address or the future distribution of the Funds amongst the Member States.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the projected nuclear liabilities bill is accounted for by the need to clean up and remediate radioactively contaminated land at nuclear sites. [73562]

Mr. Wilson: As the White Paper explains, on current estimates the total undiscounted cost of cleaning up the nuclear legacy is some £48 billion. Of this figure, 43 per cent. is the projected cost associated with decommissioning, and 47 per cent. is the projected cost associated with the processing, storage and final disposal of waste and the environmental restoration of radioactively contaminated land. The remaining 10 per cent. represents the cost of licence compliance, site infrastructure and corporate management.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with reference to paragraphs 4.8 to 4.10 of Cm 5552, on managing the nuclear legacy, if she will make it her policy not to appoint current employees of BNFL to the Liabilities Management Authority board. [73551]

Mr. Wilson: No decisions have been taken on appointments to the LMA Board. As the White Paper makes clear, appointments will be made according to the rules set out by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointment (OCPA).

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her best estimate is of the transfer value of *(a)* Thorp and *(b)* SMP, if set in place under CM5552, Managing the Nuclear Legacy. [73561]

Mr. Wilson: Transfer of assets from BNFL will be made on a basis which reflects their value at the time the transfer is made.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the assets and liabilities allocated to the proposed Liabilities Management Authority will be *(a)* subject to safeguards and *(b)* actively safeguarded by Euratom and the International Atomic Energy Agency. [73565]

Mr. Wilson: The Government's policy is that all civil nuclear material in the UK should be subject to safeguarding requirements. This policy will apply in relation to all material held at sites for which the LMA is responsible.

Energy Review

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what responses have been received on the PIU Energy Review and when the expected White Paper will be published. [71407]

Mr. Wilson: The Government has launched a consultation on energy policy, which includes consideration of the findings of the PIU Energy Review, with a view to publishing a White Paper around the turn of the year. We are posting replies to the consultation on the DTI's web site.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 23 July, ref 70369, what definition she gives to the materials that are to be transported from Japan to Sellafield. [73700]

Mr. Wilson: The material is unused Mixed Oxide Fuel.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the reply dated 23 July, ref 70369, what future use she plans for the material being transported from Japan to Sellafield. [73702]

Mr. Wilson: This is a matter for BNFL. I understand there are a number of options under consideration for re-use of the fuel.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many shipments of nuclear materials from which she believes reusable materials may be recovered are expected to be made by sea to Sellafield within the next two years. [73507]

Mr. Wilson: The timing, numbers and nature of deliveries under reprocessing contracts are a commercial matter between BNFL and its customers.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many shipments of nuclear waste have entered the UK for processing and disposal since 1997; where each shipment originated from; and how much money was received for the taking in of each shipment. [74595]

Mr. Wilson: Details of the timing of deliveries to the UK of spent nuclear fuel from overseas in fulfilment of reprocessing contracts is an operational matter for the organisations concerned. The detailed contractual arrangements, including contract prices, are a commercial matter between the contracting parties.

In respect of BNFL's contracts for THORP, it can be noted that details of the customer countries, the total amounts of spent fuel to be reprocessed and the overall value of the contracts was included in BNFL's July 1993 publication "the Economic and Commercial Justification for THORP", a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House. Since 1976 all BNFL's reprocessing contracts with overseas customers have included options for returning to the country of origin waste arising from reprocessing the fuel. It is the Government's policy that these options should be exercised.

UKAEA no longer undertakes fuel reprocessing. There has been one delivery of irradiated fuel to Dounreay since 1997—a small quantity of fuel from Georgia received in April 1998 on behalf of the UK Government.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 23 July 2002, ref. 70369, what materials, and in what quantity, can be recovered and re-used from the material to be transported from Japan to Sellafield. [73701]

Mr. Wilson: I understand from BNFL that the fuel returned to the UK from Japan contains 3439 kilograms of uranium and 255 kilograms of plutonium and that all of the uranium and plutonium can be re-used.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the role of nuclear power in energy production over the next 50 years. [74362]

Ms Hewitt: The Government is currently carrying out a review of future energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper in the New Year. The review includes consideration of the role of nuclear power generation.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received regarding market pressures constraining nuclear generator revenue. [71515]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received several representations from a number of players, including nuclear generators, regarding the market pressures on nuclear generator revenue.

Renewable Energy Generation

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to increase hydroelectric storage facilities to meet the increase in renewable energy generation. [74355]

Mr. Wilson: The UK is relatively well endowed with hydroelectric storage, with plants at Dinorwig, Ffestiniog, Ben Cruachan and Foyers, and there are no plans to increase capacity. However, storage does have a role to play in facilitating the integration of renewable generation, and the Government is supporting the development of the Regenesys fuel cell based storage technology. Regenesys is a modular, flexible, storage technology and has considerable potential to support the integration of renewable energy.

Social Landlords

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will exempt registered Social Landlords who are housing associations registered and regulated by the Housing Corporation under the Housing Act 1996 from proposals to extend administration provisions to industrial and provident societies. [73984]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Following detailed discussions with a range of interested parties, the Government tabled amendments to the Enterprise Bill at the Committee stage in the House of Lords to ensure that the Bill's provisions providing for the extension of administration to industrial and provident societies do not apply to registered social landlords under the Housing Act 1996, nor the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

e-Government

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what involvement her Department had in evaluating the completed trials of publicly-accessed IT systems in Leicestershire post offices for their potential to help roll out e-Government; and if she will make a statement. [71410]

Mr. Timms: The Department chaired the Core Evaluation Team of Government departments and other stakeholders which evaluated the Leicestershire and Rutland pilot of post offices as Government General Practitioners (*Your Guide*). The evaluation report was published on 23 July (I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend, the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 July, *Official Report* column 947W.

Beryllium

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what factors underlay the decision to license the export of beryllium to *(a)* India and *(b)* Iran in 2001. [74697]

Nigel Griffiths: All relevant export licence applications are rigorously assessed on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria and other previously announced Government policies. The consolidated criteria include a specific reference to the UK's international obligations and commitments that work to prevent the proliferation of both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

The Government's export licensing policy for Iran was set out in the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central, to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth on 28 January 1998, *Official Report*, columns 273–274W.

Since the publication of the 2001 Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls it has come to light that the entry for Beryllium, licensed for export to India, was incorrectly reported. In any case, the application was refused.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the occasions on which a licence has been granted by the Government for the export of Beryllium since 2 May 1997, stating for each licence *(a)* the country to which export was granted and *(b)* the quantity of the export. [74389]

Ms Hewitt: The export of beryllium is controlled under entries ML8 of Part III, Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, and 1C111, 1C230 and 6C004 of Annex 1 to Council Regulations (EC) No. 1334/2000.

Details of all export licences issued are published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 Annual Reports are available from the Libraries of the House. Since the publication of the 2001 Annual Report it has come to light that the entry for beryllium, licensed for export to India, was incorrectly reported. The application was refused.

Between 1 January 2002 and 17 September 2002 no Standard Individual Export Licence or Open Individual Export Licence was issued for the proposed export of beryllium.

Information on the quantity of beryllium licensed for export is being withheld from disclosure under Part II, Exemptions 13 and 14 of the Open Government Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Fuel Stocks

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many days' supply are available in the UK of *(a)* petrol, *(b)* diesel and *(c)* aviation fuel. [74437]

Mr. Wilson: At the end of July 2002, the UK had stocks equivalent to *(a)* 83 days' supply of petrol, *(b)* 51 days' supply of DERV (diesel engine road vehicle fuel), and *(c)* 46 days' supply of ATF (aviation turbine fuel).

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate the Government have made of the levels of stocks of refined petroleum products required to meet *(a)* private consumer and industrial demand and *(b)* Government use in an orderly manner in the event of a crude price spike consequent upon a conflict in Iraq; and if she will make a statement. [74439]

Mr. Wilson: At 31 July 2002 the UK had stocks equivalent to 82½ days consumption of petroleum products, which is above the stock level of 67½ days worth of consumption of oil products that the UK is obliged to hold at any one time in accordance with EU legislation.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place in the last three months with *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the IEA about a common approach to oil stocks and supply in the event of a conflict in Iraq; and if she will make a statement. [74438]

Mr. Wilson: The IEA Governing Board meets regularly to discuss oil stocks and oil emergency contingency plans.

The European Commission presented its recent draft proposals regarding energy security, including oil stock requirements at the Energy Council on 4 October where I represented the UK Government.

Firefighters (Strike)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what risk assessment has been made of the safety of *(a)* oil refineries, *(b)* chemical industry installations and *(c)* power stations should they continue to operate during a national firefighters' strike; and if she will make a statement. [74529]

Mr. Wilson: COMAH sites operated by Oil refiners and Chemical industry plus major Power Generators have conducted or are in the process of conducting safety risk assessments covering the potential fire-fighters strike.

The Health and Safety Executive inform us that COMAH or Power Station sites regulated by HSE do not have a statutory duty for emergency services to be available during routine operation.

Evidence from the Merseyside Fire Fighters strike a few years ago showed that operators were able to manage their business activities such that the lack of fire service cover did not compromise safety, and such that their business activities were not significantly compromised.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of *(a)* oil refining capacity and *(b)* oil product storage capacity would be protected from fire hazard by appliances operated by the industry in the event of a national firemen's strike; and what percentage would fail to meet safe operating standards in the event of such a strike. [74443]

Mr. Wilson: The UK Petroleum Industry Association inform us that:

a) All refineries have their own specialist fire fighting equipment and specialist fire fighting teams.

b) All oil storage facilities have their own specialist fire fighting equipment and all operations personnel are trained in the techniques of fighting oil fires.

The Health and Safety Executive inform us that:

Those oil facilities that are COMAH top tier sites are required to prepare written safety reports which demonstrate the measures they have in place are all that are necessary to prevent major incidents and limit their consequences. COMAH sites regulated by HSE do not have a statutory duty for emergency services to be available during routine operation.

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list external *(a)* public relations/ communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by her Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within her Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/ companies. [74676]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not readily available and could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

Sub-Post Offices, Huntingdon

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which sub-Post Office branches in the Huntingdon constituency will have cash machines installed by April 2003. [74220]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Post Office Limited and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon Member.

Mineworkers' Pension Funds

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column 775W, on mineworkers' pension funds; if she will made a statement on the timetable for completion of the review. [73797]

Mr. Wilson: Discussions are continuing with the trustees of the Mineworkers Pension Scheme and the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme to review the arrangements for the government's guarantee of member's basic pension benefits. That guarantee has served the schemes well, providing the security to enable the trustees to pursue a very positive investment strategy, both generating significant benefits for scheme members and protecting those gains in less favourable circumstances.

A number of improvements to the Schemes that will benefit their members have already been agreed.

On the central question of the way in which Government is compensated for the guarantee it has been agreed that further discussions should now concentrate on whether there may be any different methods of paying for the guarantee and other ways of guaranteeing bonuses where those different methods might offer advantages to Scheme members and do not represent a significant extra burden on the taxpayer. Discussions of those issues will include some detailed technical issues and will require advice from actuarial experts. It is hoped it will be possible to conclude these discussions in the next twelve months.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which post offices Consignia is planning to close in the Taunton constituency; and if she will make a statement. [74088]

Mr. Timms: The programme to restructure the urban post office network has not yet started and I am advised by Post Office Limited that, until it does, there are no specific plans for post office closures in the Taunton constituency. When the programme starts it will be taken forward in consultation with individual subpostmasters, the community, local stakeholders and Postwatch.

The objective of the urban network restructuring programme is to ensure that subpostmasters have the opportunity to build a viable business as well as to provide modernised and improved facilities which meet customers' needs and expectations and are in the right location for the local community.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her latest estimate is of the number of post offices and sub post offices that are likely to close over the next three years; and if she will make a statement. [74494]

Mr. Timms: Post Office Ltd will take forward an urban network restructuring programme whose objective will be to ensure that subpostmasters have the opportunity to build a viable business as well as to provide modernised and improved facilities which meet customers' needs and expectations and are in the right location for the local community. The programme will involve a significant number of urban post office closures over the next three years, but it is not yet known precisely how many. In rural areas, the Government has committed that there should be no avoidable post office closures before at least 2006. There has been a sharp fall in the number of rural closures.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on how many sub post offices have closed in *(a)* gross and *(b)* net terms in each month since 1997. [74590]

Ms Hewitt: Since 1997 net annual figures for post office closures are:

March 1997	163
March 1998	243
March 1999	233
March 2000	382
March 2001	547
March 2002	262

I understand from Post Office Limited that gross closure figures have only been available on a quarterly basis from September 2000 and neither gross nor net closure figures are available on a monthly basis.

Gas

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what policies she has to meet the estimated demand for gas from 2005 onwards. [74357]

Mr. Wilson: After 2005, as now, I expect gas to be supplied to the UK market by private companies operating in a competitive market. Government's role is to work with industry through PILOT to maximise the economic benefit to the UK of its own oil and gas resources, and with the Governments of exporting countries to set a political framework to facilitate commercial agreements between companies in the UK and in other countries. Energy security is central to energy policy and will be addressed in the forthcoming Energy White Paper.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when the EU Advisory Committee on state aid for the application of Articles 92 and 93 of the EC Treaty to certain categories of horizontal state aid (exemption) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement; [67748]

(2) when the EU Advisory Committee on state aid on the arrangements for applying Article 93 of the EC Treaty (procedure) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [67736]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on categories of horizontal state aid last met on 24 July. Neither committee is currently due to meet. The UK is normally represented at these committees by officials from my Department.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the implementation of the Multiannual Community Programme to Stimulate the Establishment of the Information Society in Europe is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* a remembers of it; and if she will make a statement. [68550]

Ms Hewitt: No date has been fixed for the next meeting of this EU Committee. As the programme concludes at the end of 2002, one further meeting is expected in the second half of the year.

The UK is represented by a single DTI official. The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee for the implementation of projects, actions and measures for the interoperability of trans-European networks for the interchange of data between administrations is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64903]

Ms Hewitt: The correct title of the Committee is the Telematics between Administrations Committee (TAC). It is next due to meet on 3 December 2002. The UK is usually represented by an official from the Office of the e-Envoy, within the Cabinet Office. The Cabinet Office delegate to this committee represents all of the UK.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Ministerial level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on the specific programme for research, technological development and demonstration on promotion of innovation and participation of SMEs is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive have been members of it; and if she will make a statement. [64915]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee on the specific programme for research, technological development and demonstration on the promotion of innovation and participation of SMEs, which was established under the EU's Fifth Framework Programme (1999–2002), is next due to meet on 17 October 2002. Officials from the Office of Science and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry provide the UK representation. Representatives of the Scottish Executive have not been members of this committee.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on formulation and implementation of EU research and development policy that touches on matters which fall within the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

Iraq

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much grant was paid to subsidise the retail cost of the report of an Inquiry into the export of defence equipment and dual-use goods to Iraq and related prosecutions. [68887]

Nigel Griffiths: In 1995 the DTI paid a subsidy of £80,100 towards the retail cost of the Scott Report.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employees under contract from temping agencies worked in her Department; and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [72636]

Ms Hewitt: The Department and its agencies do not keep full records of temporary agency staff. Temps work for varied periods ranging from hours to months.

We do not keep information on the overall spend on temporary agency staff.

General Agreement on Trade In Services

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research projects being carried out by the World Bank on assessing the impact of liberalisation on developing countries achieved through GATS negotiations are being supported by her Department. [72058]

Ms Hewitt: None. However the Department for International Development has been funding the World Bank Research Programme on Trade in Services since 1997 and is due to continue doing so until 2004. This programme aims to generate and draw together data and research on the impact of services liberalisation, with a view to improving services trade policy formulation and facilitating the services negotiations at the WTO. One of the central components of the programme is the creation of a database on measures affecting trade in services. The programme also includes a number of policy research projects, the results of which are available on the World Bank website (http://wwwl.worldbank.org/wbiep/trade/services.html#overview).

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received against the inclusion of water services in GATS; and if she will make a statement. [72187]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* Over the past months, the Government has received a number of representations from Members, organisations and members of the public against the inclusion of water services in the GATS on the grounds that this would lead to forced privatisation and deregulation of these services, to the detriment of the poor.

The Government understands these concerns, but does not believe that the GATS will lead to such outcomes. The GATS is a bottom-up agreement, meaning that individual WTO Members decide for themselves whether, to what extent, and when to open up services where they think this will be beneficial. To date, no WTO Member has made a GATS commitment relating to pure drinking water (although some commitments have been made in relation to waste water treatment).

The European Community believes that improvements in the supply of water, which are needed in many poorer developing countries, can be achieved by involving the private sector in partnership with governments, given limits on public funding. One of the key outcomes from the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development was a new global target to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation, in support of the Millennium Development Goal to halve the proportion of people without access to clean water. The EC sees the GATS as a logical complement to these commitments.

It may be that some WTO Members will decide that it is in their interest to involved the private sector in the funding and/or provision of their water services in order to increase investment and relieve over-stretched resources. They may also decide to open this sector to foreign companies. The aim of GATS commitments would be to ensure that such access is offered on fair and non-discriminatory terms.

Should WTO Members choose to liberalise in this way, nothing in the GATS can prevent them from regulating to ensure that prices charged are affordable, or to secure other universal service obligations. Nor can the Agreement pressure them into a specific public or private service delivery model. Moreover, the EC's requests purposefully highlight the importance of liberalisation being underpinned by domestic regulatory framework designed to ensure the achievement of public policy objectives.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to call for a comprehensive review by the WTO of the impact of increased service liberalisation, especially on water services, before implementing GATS; and if she will make a statement. [72190]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 July 2002]:* The Government has said on previous occasions that we fully support an impact assessment of the liberalisation of trade in services. WTO Members have already agreed to make this an on-going aspect of the current GATS negotiations at the WTO, and through the European Community we are participating actively in discussion on this issue in WTO Council for Trade in Services. We are also funding research by the World Bank that aims to generate and draw together data and research on the impact of services liberalisation in a wide range of countries, with a view to improving services trade policy formulation and facilitating the current negotiations.

As regards implementation of GATS commitments in the UK, we will shortly consult fully on the requests being made of us in order to assess the potential impact of responding to these requests.

Organisational Remits (South-East)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which areas of responsibility held by *(a)* South East England Regional Assembly and *(b)* Surrey Learning and Skills Council fall within her Department's areas of activity; what their key functions are; from where they draw funding; what their total annual budget is; and what assessment she has made of the value for money they deliver in those areas covered by her Department. [73378]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State has responsibility for the 8 English Chambers outside London, including the South East. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Department for Education and Skills has responsibility for the Local Learning And Skills Councils.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the remit is of *(a)* Business Link Surrey, *(b)* an Enterprise Hub, *(c)* Manufacturers' Advisory Service South East, *(d)* a Regional Centre for Manufacturing Excellence, *(e)* the Small Business Service, *(f)* South East England Development Agency, *(g)* South East Framework for Regional Employment & Skills Action, *(h)* Surrey Economic Partnership, *(i)* Workforce Development Group, *(j)* Surrey Sustainable Business Partnership and *(k)* Surrey Training and Enterprise Council; what their key functions are; from where they draw funding; what their total annual budgets are; and what assessment she has made of the value for money they deliver. [73377]

Alan Johnson: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action has been taken against employers in Portsmouth, South who have failed to pay the national minimum wage; and if she will make a statement. [73872]

Alan Johnson: The Inland Revenue enforces the national minimum wage on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry. National minimum wage data is not disaggregated to constituency level. However, Portsmouth South falls into the Inland Revenue's South East region where, for the year ended 31 March 2002, 119 employers were found not to be paying the minimum wage and £289,722 in wages arrears was identified on behalf of more than 1,150 workers.

Post Office Artifacts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has had with the Post Office on its artifacts collection; and if she will make a statement. [73340]

Mr. Timms: This is an issue for Consignia plc. No discussions have taken place.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Post Office has indicated to her Department that it will make its collection of historic artifacts previously displayed in the National Postal Museum available to view by the public; and if she will make a statement. [73339]

Mr. Timms: This is an issue for Consignia plc. However, I understand from the company that the historical records of The Post Office, from the 17th century to the 20th are open to the public at Freeling House at Mount Pleasant in London on weekdays. The philatelic material previously at the National Postal Museum is also stored there and most of it may be viewed by prior appointment. I am also advised by the company that it is actively developing plans that would enable improved access to the stored historical artefacts formerly in the Museum.

Post Office Museum

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has held with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport regarding the future of the Post Office Museum; and if she will make a statement. [73341]

Mr. Timms: This is an issue for Consignia plc. No discussions have taken place.

Miners (Compensation)

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners from the north Somerset coalfield have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* received compensation awards. [73426]

Mr. Wilson: The table attached shows the number of offers and payments made for vibration white finger (VWF) and respiratory disease (COPD) in the constituencies of Somerton and Frome and Wansdyke.

	VWF	*COPD*
Claims registered	10	287
Full & Final Settlements (inc. Denied/ Withdrawn)	4	65
Value of Full & Final Settlements	£3,113	£409,638
Offers outstanding	3	57
Value of outstanding offers	£8,646	£320,149
Interim Payments made	0	110
Value of Interim Payments	0	£593,835

Note:
The Wansdyke and Somerton & Frome constituencies were defined using postcodes beginning as follows: BA2–4, BA8, BA11, BA22, BS14–15, BS30–31, BS39–40, and TA11.

Post Office Services

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which directives of the European Commission have come into effect since July 2000 reducing reserved areas, or price monopoly, of the Royal Mail and Post Office services; what consent was given by ministers at the relevant ministerial councils; and what reports were made to Parliament relating to them. [74116]

Mr. Timms: The European Postal Directive 2002/39/EC came into effect on 5 July 2002. The effect of the Directive is to reduce the upper weight/price limit, of that part of the postal market that member states may reserve to national universal service providers where necessary to maintain the universal service, from the current limit of 350 grams/5 times the basic weight first class tariff to 100g/ 3 times the basic weight first class tariff from 1 January 2003 and to 50g/ 2.5 times the basic weight first class tariff from 1 January 2006. The Directive was scrutinised and cleared by the European Committees of both Houses. The UK supported the adoption of this Directive in the Council.

Post Office Subsidiaries

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the wholly owned subsidiaries of the Post Office in *(a)* France, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* Austria, *(d)* the Netherlands, *(e)* Denmark and *(f)* Ireland and those partially owned but controlled in Sweden and the (i) cumulative losses or profits from each over the period of such holdings in these enterprises and (ii) total contributions they made to Her Majesty's Treasury. [74115]

Mr. Timms: The wholly owned subsidiaries of Consignia plc are as follows:

a) France: Consignia France, Courier Services, Direct Express, IS Transport, General Logistics Systems France, Extand, Extand Finanzas, Extand Normandie, Extand Relais and Extand Sistema

b) Germany: Consignia Deutschland, Consignia Holdings GmbH, Consignia Systems, German Parcel Beteiligungs GmbH, German Parcel EDV Handels und Vermietungs GmbH, German Parcel Paket-Logistik Depot 50 GmbH, German Parcel Paket-Logistik GmbH & Co. OHG, German Parcel Paket-Transport GmbH per cent. Co. OHG, Goliath 47 Beitlungs und Verwaltungs GmbH, Der Kurier, Der Kurier Beteiligungs, Deutscher Paket Dienst Dachser and Overnight Service

c) Austria: General Parcel Austria

d) the Netherlands: General Logistic Systems International Holdings, RM (Netherlands) 1, Distributiecentra Nederland, NPD Holding, Nederland Pakket Dienst, NPD Services and Extand Hollande

e) Denmark: FDS Financial Distribution, Pakke Trans, Pakke Trans Anlaeg Aps and Staffetten

f) Ireland: General Parcel (Ireland) Ltd, Williames Ltd, Williames Air Freight (I) Ltd, Williames Cargo Systems Ltd, Williames Logistics Ltd, Fitzhan, Vicom Logistix Limited, General Parcel Aer and Information Solution (Ireland)

g) Sweden: Pakke Trans (Sweden), FDS Financial Distribution and AB Grundstenen 87274

The performance of these acquisitions is commercially confidential and therefore cannot be detailed here.

Prizes (Phone Calls)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will introduce legislation to regulate the activities of companies offering cash and other prizes which can be claimed only by expensive phone calls of several minutes' duration; and if she will make a statement. [74464]

Mr. Timms: The activities of such companies are already regulated, by the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS), and must abide by the Code of Practice drawn up and enforced by ICSTIS. If companies breach this Code, for example by unreasonably prolonging their services, they can be fined or even banned from providing services altogether.

Pulpwood Industry

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the effect that recycling has had on the pulpwood industry over the last five years. [74571]

Mr. Wilson: The amount of recycled fibre used in the pulpwood industry in recent years has increased significantly and as a result the demand for virgin pulp has remained fairly static even though demand for paper has increased significantly.

In 1983 UK paper mills used 1.8 million tonnes of recovered fibre, rising to 4.3 million tonnes in 1996 and peaking at 4.9 million tonnes in 2000. In 2001 the 87 pulp, paper and board mills in the UK used 4.6 million tonnes of recovered fibre in producing 6.2 million tonnes of paper giving a 74 per cent. utilization rate for recovered fibre, the highest level in the EU after Spain. The growth in the use of recovered fibre has generally mirrored growth in production tonnages, whereas the amount of primary UK produced pulp and imported pulp used in the production of paper has remained relatively static since 1990 with between 0.5–0.6 million tonnes of UK produced pulp and between 1.6–1.7 million tonnes of imported pulp being used annually.

A voluntary agreement by the Newspaper Publishers Association to increase the recycled content of newsprint to 60 per cent. by 2001 was achieved ahead of schedule. An average 63.5 per cent. recycled content was obtained. This coupled with the targets defined in the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulations 1997 (Amendment) has significantly contributed to the leading UK position. These regulations facilitated an investment of £73 million into the paper industry between 1999–2001 from the sale of Packaging Waste Recovery Notes (PRNs) and Packaging Export Recovery Notes (PERNs).

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for the development of nuclear energy. [74079]

Mr. Wilson: Nuclear Power currently provides about a quarter of UK's electricity supplies. Existing stations are expected to continue to contribute to the country's energy requirements and to helping limit carbon emissions provided they do so to the high safety and environmental standards currently observed.

The current energy policy consultation is considering the future role of all generation sources, including nuclear power, in delivering a future energy policy. Submissions have been requested by 13 September and we intend to issue a White Paper around the turn of the year.

Nuclear Reactors

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has for speeding up safety checks on nuclear reactors; [74080]

(2) what plans she has to reform the system of licensing new nuclear reactors; and if she will make a statement. [74078]

Mr. Wilson: I have no such plans. The day-to-day regulation of nuclear safety is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive.

Construction Materials

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the sustainable certification of the construction materials *(a)* stone, *(b)* steel and *(c)* timber. [74605]

Mr. Wilson: The sustainability of the built environment and the materials from which it is constructed is a key component of our Rethinking Construction strategy for the construction industry. The sustainable use of materials is dependent on a wide range of factors such as embodied energy, renewability, manufacturing process emissions, designed use, social costs, recycling, reuse and end of life disposal.

Product sustainability certification is in its infancy, both within the UK and internationally. We are working closely with our European partners to produce sensible international standards on a whole-life costing basis.

Within the UK we have sponsored the Building Research Establishment to develop tools to quantify the environmental performance of products and processes. The result has been the introduction of the Ecopoint system that offers a basis for comparative assessment of building products and processes. This system is now being used to evaluate individual products to offer a clear, understandable indicator for product sustainability that can be applied to the fully breadth of products used in the construction industry.

Steel

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to prevent imports of steel from Eastern European countries which are produced in inefficient plants with highly pollutant side effects. [74599]

Mr. Wilson: A number of anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures are in force against several steel products from various Eastern European countries. In addition, definitive safeguard measures introduced by the EU to guard against trade diversion as a result of the US safeguard measure announced in March include products from Eastern Europe. The EU also has agreements with Russia and Ukraine applying quantitative restrictions to imports of certain steel products from these countries.

These measures have been taken to protect EU industry from unfair trade practices that harm EU industries or, in the case of the safeguard measure, to prevent a damaging surge of imports into the EU. Neither EU commercial policy instruments nor WTO agreements contain provisions providing for environmental factors to be taken into account when restricting imports.

Stone Imports

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she takes to ensure that the country of origin of stone imports is known. [74600]

Mr. Wilson: Stone, being a heavy product incurs high transportation costs and has little import penetration within the UK. Most stone used in the UK travels less than thirty miles from its point of extraction to its point of use and less than 2 per cent. is imported. Over half those imports are from within the EU, subject to EU regulation and freedom of movement within the economic area. Stone forms a very small part of the goods and products imported to the UK and it would not be cost effective to monitor their origins. We do, however keep close contact with stone industry trade associations and discuss issues including imports.

Rethinking Construction Demonstration Projects

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on each of the sponsored projects put forward by each Government department as rethinking construction demonstration projects. [74601]

Mr. Wilson: The following Rethinking Construction demonstration projects have substantially been funded and procured by Central Government departments and agencies. It excludes those being taken forward by the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Project 4: New Environment Agency Facility Building

Project 5: Kingston Hospital NHS Trust—New Ward Block

Project 24: North East Combined Capital Works

Project 26: Lincshore—sea defence

Project 29: Covered Ways 12 & 58—London Underground structural work

Project 28: M60 Manchester Outer Ring Road, Denton—Middleton

Project 33: Building Down Barriers

Project 52: Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Project 55: Earth Structure project—Work on London Underground structures

Project 83: Calderdale Healthcare PFI

Project 124: Princess Margaret Hospital Relocation

Project 126: Area 21 Highways Agency—Maintenance of network in North London

Project 147: RAF Kinloss Nimrod MRA4 Station

Project 167: 9 Dock Project—Trident submarine refuelling and refining facility.

Project 219: Greater London Authority Headquarters

Project 267: HMP Prefabrication and Pre-Assembly

Project 330: Lower Tone Flood Defence Improvements Scheme

Project 349: M62 Junction and Widening Jcts 8–9

Further information on any of the above demonstration projects is available from the Movement for Innovation section of the Rethinking Construction website at: www.m4i.org.uk/m4i/projects/projects.asp

International Accounting Standards

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received on the European Regulation on International Accounting Standards. [73771]

Miss Melanie Johnson: On 2 September I published a consultation document on the options for extending the application of the European Regulation on International Accounting Standards. The closing date for comments is 26 November 2002. After the consultation I will publish a summary of the responses to the consultation.

Venture Capital

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on Government policies to encourage venture capital in the UK. [73832]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government recognises the importance of venture capital as a source of finance for business and we have aimed to create an economic climate in which the venture capital industry can flourish. As well as providing tax incentives to encourage more individuals to invest in venture capital, we have commissioned the Myners Study to examine how it might be possible to encourage more institutional investment.

We have worked closely with representatives of the venture capital industry to develop programmes like the UK High Technology Fund, Regional Venture Capital Funds and the Community Development Venture Fund. In each of these the Government, by making a core investment, has successfully levered in significant private sector finance. This is the first time that a Government of this country has directly invested in venture capital funds with the aim of improving small and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) access to finance.

Small Businesses

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on small business growth in the last 12 months. [73962]

Nigel Griffiths: The latest (National Statistics) 2001 SME Statistics shows the following differences from the 2000 estimates, for the UK as a whole.

There were nearly 24,000 more businesses in 2001.

Employment was nearly 0.5 million higher.

Turnover was about £78 billion higher in 2001 than 2000.

Over 99.5 per cent. of the increase in business numbers occurred in the SME category (0 to 249 employees). SMEs also accounted for 70 per cent. of the increase in employment and about 57 per cent. of the turnover increase.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the rate of *(a)* small business and *(b)* venture capital growth has been over the past five years, broken down by region. [73833]

Nigel Griffiths: *(a)* Using SME Statistics and VAT Registrations and De-registrations data the following trends are apparent for the period 1997–2001.

For the UK as a whole there were about 3.71 million small businesses (0 to 49 employees) in 2001. This was an increase of about 36,000 on the 1997 estimates. A more detailed look at the figures shows that this has actually occurred despite a big decrease of about 50,000 from 1997 to 1998. There has been an annual increase of at least 20,000 businesses every year since 1998.

Regional SME statistics are not available for 2000 or 2001. In the period 1997–1999 only London saw an increase in the number of small businesses (approximately 98,500 more).

In 2001 there were about 7,000 (4 per cent.) less VAT registrations than in 1997 (UK level). The number of VAT de-registrations in the UK also fell by about 1,700 (1 per cent.).

All regions except West Midlands region saw fewer registrations in 2001 than in 1997. All except Eastern and London regions had fewer de-registrations in 2001 than in 1997.

(b) For the UK as a whole 17 per cent. more companies received investment in 2001 than in 1997. The amount of investment in 2001 was 55 per cent. higher than in 1997. However, there was a 25 per cent. decrease in the amount invested from 2000 to 2001, but more companies received this money.

In the 1997–2001 period 5 English regions (Yorkshire & Humber, Eastern, London, South East and South West) have seen an increase in the number of companies receiving investment. Northern Ireland also saw this trend.

6 English regions (all except North West, Yorkshire & Humber and West Midlands) saw an increase in the amount of investment over the period. This was also the case in Scotland.

London saw the biggest changes over the period. From 1997 to 2001 there were 84 per cent. more companies invested in and a 160 per cent. increase in the amount invested.

Auditing and Accounting

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress the joint DTI-Treasury chaired group has made on the *(a)* analysis and *(b)* response to the auditing and accounting issues raised by recent corporate failures. [73737]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accounting Issues published an Interim Report on 24 July. Copies of the Report were placed in the Libraries of the House.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, welcomed the report in a Statement on the same day. In response to a recommendation in the Interim Report, she announced that there would be an immediate review of the regulation of the audit and accountancy professions in the UK. The Terms of Reference for that Review have now been published and are as set out below:

To review the current arrangements for the regulation of the accountancy and audit professions; to consider whether revised arrangements and structures are necessary to provide assurance to the public that these are effective; and, if so, to recommend what form they should take.

In particular, the review should look at:

the regulatory functions that are necessary in the public interest, and how they should be carried out, including desirable simplification

the balance between professional self regulation and independent regulation in carrying out these functions; and the extent to which these should be on a statutory basis

the case for taking a different approach to the regulation of the accountancy profession in general and to the regulation of auditors in particular

the funding arrangements and in particular whether these are consistent with the concept of independent regulation

the responsibilities and accountabilities of the various bodies, including the process of making appointments

In considering these issues, the review should also have regard to:

the principles of good regulation established by the Better Regulation Task Force

international developments, especially in the United States and the European Union

the requirements of the 8 EU Company Law Directive and the Companies Act 1989 on the regulation of auditors

the relationship between these arrangements and the work of the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) and its subsidiary bodies, and the responsibilities of the Financial Services Authority in relation to listed companies.

the other work being carried out following the interim report by the Coordinating Group on Accounting and Audit, and the Secretary of State's Statement to Parliament of 24 July 2002.

The review should report by January 2003.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when *(a)* she and *(b)* the Minister for Energy have (i) met and (ii) spoken to *(A)* the Chairman and *(B)* the directors of (1) British Energy and (2) British Nuclear Fuels Limited since 1 June 2001; and what the nature of each discussion was. [74369]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers and Officials from my Department have had regular discussions on a wide range of issues with the Chairman and directors of British Energy and British Nuclear Fuels Limited.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* dates and *(b)* purpose of (i) meetings and (ii) discussions ministers in her Department have had with the European commissioners for *(A)* Transport and Energy, *(B)* Competition, *(C)* Enterprise and Information Society, *(D)* Internal Market, *(E)* Taxation and Customs Union, *(F)* Economic and Monetary Affairs, *(G)* Trade, *(H)* Health and Consumer Protection, *(I)* Education and Culture and *(J)* Employment and Social Affairs since June 2001. [74381]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers undertake bilateral meetings with any EU Commissioners as and when appropriate. No one central record is kept of Ministerial meetings with each individual EU Commissioner and to provide such detailed information would entail disproportionate costs.

Data Collation

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the form in which *(a)* questions and *(b)* comments from third parties made to her Department by (i) telephone, (ii) e-mail, (iii) fax, (iv) letter and (v) other means are collated. [74388]

Ms Hewitt: Questions and comments from third parties received by my Department in writing—by e-mail, fax or letter—are kept on file by the directorate to which the correspondence is relevant. Replies, where applicable, to that correspondence are filed with it.

Unless of an ephemeral nature, verbal enquiries or comments, by telephone or otherwise, are noted for the record and similarly filed. Where possible third parties are encouraged to put substantive comments and queries in writing to the Department.

Export Licences

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the licences agreed by her Department since 2 May 1997 for the export of material to *(a)* Iran and *(b)* India, stating for each licence (i) what it was for and (ii) what checks were made to establish whether it could be used for arms production. [74393]

Ms Hewitt: Leaving aside concerns over confidentiality, it would entail disproportionate cost to provide details of all export licences issued to Iran and India since 2 May 1997, together with information on what the proposed export was for and what checks were made to establish whether it could be used for arms production.

Details of all export licences issued are published by destination in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001 Annual Reports are available from the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the publications produced by her Department since 25 February, stating for each the *(a)* number of copies produced and *(b)* cost of production. [74754]

Ms Hewitt: A list of those DTI publications produced since 25 February 2002 which have been notified to my Department's Publications Unit has been placed in the Libraries of the House. For publications produced prior to this date I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 849–850W. The listing includes the total cost incurred by the Department in publishing, preparation and production of each publication (where notified centrally), and excludes publications produced for internal use.

Information on the number of copies produced is not held centrally by the Publications Unit and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Lost Post

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what percentage of *(a)* first and *(b)* second class letters and packages were lost in each of the last five years. [74394]

Ms Hewitt: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Consignia Limited and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Broadband Market

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the

Government's progress towards the target of the United Kingdom having the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005. [74387]

Ms Hewitt: In the UK Online Annual Report (November, 2001), it was announced that the UK was fourth in the G7 in terms of competitiveness, ahead of the other European members of the G7, and fifth in terms of extensiveness. We will publish updated figures later this year.

Advisers and Consultants

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the advisers or consultants retained by her Department since 1 June 2001, stating for each adviser or consultant (i) the purpose, (ii) the length and (iii) the cost of their retention. [74589]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not readily available centrally and could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

Unionised Workers

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of unionised workers in the (i) private sector, (ii) public sector and (iii) in total in each year since 1997. [74407]

Ms Hewitt: The number and percentage of unionised workers in (i) the private sector, (ii) the public sector and (iii) in total in each year from 1997 are summarised in the tables below. Table 1 refers to employees only and table 2 to all in employment, which includes the self-employed. Both tables exclude the armed forces and the "all in employment" figures also exclude unpaid family workers and those on college based schemes.

Table 1. Trade union membership and density for employees[1], UK

	Private sector thousands	*per cent.*	*Public sector thousands*	*per cent.*	*Total thousands*	*per cent.*
1997	3426	19.7	3670	61.0	7096	30.4
1998	3462	19.3	3677	61.0	7139	29.9
1999	3496	19.2	3708	59.9	7204	29.6
2000	3448	18.7	3835	60.2	7283	29.5
2001	3460	18.6	3786	59.3	7246	29.1

Note:
[1] Includes all employees, excluding members of the armed forces. These data do not include the self-employed, unpaid family workers and those on government training schemes.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, Autumn quarters from 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001.

Table 2. Trade union membership and density for all in employment[1], UK

	Private sector thousands	*per cent.*	*Public sector thousands*	*per cent.*	*Total thousands*	*per cent.*
1997	3701	17.7	3671	60.8	7372	27.4
1998	3717	17.5	3679	60.8	7396	27.1
1999	3789	17.6	3709	59.8	7498	27.1
2000	3746	17.3	3834	60.0	7580	27.1
2001	3762	17.2	3788	59.2	7550	26.8

Note:
[1] Includes all those in employment, excluding members of the armed forces, unpaid family workers, and those on college based schemes. These data include the self-employed and those on government training schemes not based at a college.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, Autumn quarters from 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001.

Ofgem

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on discussions between her Department and Ofgem since 1 August. [74383]

Ms Hewitt: My Ministerial colleagues, Departmental Officials and I have regular discussions with the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets on a range of issues.

Consignia

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the financial results of Consignia in each of the last five years. [74384]

Mr. Timms: The post tax profit/(loss), including exceptional items, for each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	*Outturn £ million*
2001–2002	(940)
2000–2001	49
1999–2000	(264)
1998–1999	496
1997–1998	447

The recent poor performance of the company, is the result of deep-seated problems that have not been addressed over a number of years. Government has now put in place steps for this to be remedied. These include the appointment of new board members and making available the £1.8 billion of accumulated reserves, which will back much needed investment in the mails business and Post Office Limited.

TRANSPORT

Cycling

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress has been made towards meeting the Government's target of increasing the proportion of journeys made by bicycle. [71423]

Mr. Jamieson: We have an extensive programme of action to support and promote cycling. As part of their Local Transport Plans, local authorities are now expected to develop and deliver local cycling strategies. These strategies are currently being audited by the National Cycling Strategy Board for England, with help from a new team of experts based in the regions. We have also recently announced the first tranche of awards from the new national Cycling Projects Fund, from which we are supporting 138 projects at a cost of £2.18 million.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to introduce free off-peak travel for pensioners on public transport. [71424]

Mr. Jamieson: Under the Transport Act 2000, our standard minimum requirement for concessionary travel in England ensures half fares for pensioners and disabled people on local buses, with a free pass. Local authorities may make more generous provision, including free travel, at their discretion. From 1 April 2003 men aged 60 and over will benefit from existing schemes.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance the Government are giving to local authorities in respect of Freedom travel passes for blind people who are not of retirement age; and if he will make a statement. [74287]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Act 2000 (and the GLA Act 1999 as amended by the Transport Act) provides for the Secretary of State to issue statutory guidance to local authorities, including the London Boroughs, which they must take into account when deciding whether someone is eligible for concessionary travel under the disability criteria. Blind or partially-sighted persons are listed in guidance issued last year as one of the seven eligible categories of disabled persons. The guidance can be viewed at www.dft.gov.uk/itwp/consult/cf/disabled/index.htm.

The Transport Act 2000 provides for a statutory minimum 50 per cent. discount on local bus services for elderly and disabled people in England and Wales. Many local authorities, including those in London, choose to offer better schemes and under the Act are still free to do so.

In London, the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (GLA 1999) requires the 33 London local authorities to agree arrangements for concessionary travel for their elderly and disabled residents with Transport for London annually. This scheme is known as the Freedom Pass. It provides free travel on buses, tube and rail services for all blind people meeting the disability criteria in the statutory guidance.

Trans-Pennine Rail Links

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the need for improved trans-Pennine rail links. [71425]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan sets out proposals for improved services for both passengers and freight.

Rail Infrastructure

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress he is making on improving the rail network on the North of England. [71426]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan sets out investment priorities for the network—including the North of England—and identifies how the Authority expects the key targets in our 10-Year Transport Plan to be delivered.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when railway tracks and signals will be upgraded to allow Virgin to operate its tilting train. [73853]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's proposed strategy for the West Coast Main Line would provide for the first major stage of renewal and upgrade work on the line to be completed by September 2004, when the new Pendolino trains will be able to operate at 125mph using their tilting abilities.

Rolling Stock

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he expects the new rolling stock on the Hastings to Charing Cross line to be fully operational; and what account he has taken in the 10-year plan of the need to upgrade the line to facilitate this. [71427]

Mr. Jamieson: Connex has ordered 618 new vehicles of which 84 are now available for passenger service or driver training. Further vehicles are expected to enter service this year. The 10-year plan provides for investment in new rolling stock and infrastructure to achieve our targets for performance quality and growth.

Trams

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement on funding of trams in Greater Manchester. [71428]

Mr. Spellar: The Government approved in principle funding for a package of three extensions to Manchester Metrolink two years ago. Tenders have now come in at prices that are significantly above forecasts. We are therefore considering whether the project is still affordable and will reach a view as soon as possible.

Rail Services

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority regarding high-speed rail lines to the North of England and Scotland. [71431]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The Strategic Rail Authority's study into the need for and viability of a high speed line running between London and the North of England and

Scotland is due to be completed later this year. The Authority will report the findings to Ministers at that time.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what measures the Government are taking to improve train punctuality. [71432]

Mr. Jamieson: We have made it a priority objective for the Strategic Rail Authority to work with the rail industry to achieve substantial and lasting improvements in performance. They are doing so.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what changes to the rail network he plans. [71433]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Plan, published by the Strategic Rail Authority in January 2002, sets out a series of projects and timescales which, if met, will deliver the targets set out in the Government's 10 Year Plan for transport.

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement on passenger rail services to Corby. [71439]

Mr. Jamieson: Under their franchise agreement Midland Mainline provide a bus shuttle service between Corby and Kettering Station to connect with train services. Initial studies have indicated that a rail service would require considerable continuing financial support. I understand that Catalyst Corby (the urban Regeneration Company for the area) is working towards a bid for Rail Passenger Partnership funds from the Strategic Rail Authority.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress has been made over the past three years in increasing the public use of rail services. [71442]

Mr. Jamieson: Usage of the railways, measured in passenger kilometres, has increased by nearly 8 per cent. over the past three years, from 36.3 billion in 1998/99 to 39.1 billion in 2001/02.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement on investment in respect of the Norwich to Liverpool Street railway line. [71436]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is creating a new "Greater Anglia" franchise, through which it will consider ways of improving performance and replacing rolling stock on the Norwich-London route. The infrastructure on the route is currently affected by a backlog of renewal work and the SRA is considering options for addressing this.

Bus Services

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement on the progress of bus quality partnerships. [71434]

Mr. Jamieson: Quality bus partnerships are helping to attract more people to public transport by improving the quality of local bus services. A survey undertaken for my Department recorded that 134 voluntary quality bus partnership agreements were in place in England and Wales in 2001. Some authorities are actively considering statutory quality bus partnership schemes as part of their bus strategies.

Transport Links

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what action he is taking to improve transport links between England and Scotland. [71435]

Mr. Jamieson: The majority of transport functions have been devolved to the Scottish Executive. On reserved matters, we consult regularly with the Executive. We are currently in discussion with the Executive on a number of issues, including regional air services and rail infrastructure, in conjunction with the Strategic Rail Authority.

Trust Ports

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what progress his Department has made with modernising trust ports. [71438]

Mr. Jamieson: Of the 51 trust ports that fall within my Department's area of responsibility (England and Wales), so far 12 have achieved full compliance and 15 have prepared draft orders that are either with the Department for comment or about to be made. We are working with the remaining 24 trust ports in the preparation of their implementation plans and draft orders.

Transport 10-year Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list the elements of the 10-year plan which are running behind schedule, as set out in the memoranda published by his Department in 2000. [71440]

Mr. Jamieson: A report on the 10-Year Plan for transport, which will set out progress to date, will be published in the Autumn.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements are in place to review the effectiveness of the 10-year plan for transport. [73763]

Mr. Jamieson: Progress towards delivery of the objectives in the 10-Year Plan is monitored continuously.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the timetable steps outlined in the Delivery of Improvements over the Life of the Plan memorandum published at the time of the publication of the 10-Year Plan have been met. [73379]

Mr. Jamieson: A report on the 10-Year Plan for transport, which will set out progress made to date, will be published in the Autumn.

Rail Franchises

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement concerning the grant of the rail franchise for Wales. [71441]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority expects to award the Wales and Borders franchise in the Spring of next year. The new franchise is likely to start next Autumn.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement on the South West Trains franchise negotiations. [71443]

Mr. Jamieson: Negotiations between the Strategic Rail Authority and Stagecoach are in progress. In June of this year they reached agreement on an interim deal costing £29 million up to February 2003 that will deliver early passenger benefits, including the replacement of Mark 1 trains.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the extension of the Thames Trains franchise. [74753]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is in negotiation with Go-Ahead Group regarding a possible two-year extension of the Thames Trains franchise, which expires in April 2004.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the impact of making speed cameras more visible; and if he will make a statement. [71444]

Mr. Jamieson: The camera visibility rules for those areas in the safety camera netting off came into force on 1 July 2002. It is too early to judge their effectiveness although initial feedback from the participant areas suggests that compliance is improved at the yellow fixed camera sites.

Air Traffic Capacity

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to meet the demand for air traffic capacity in the South East. [71445]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East Consultation Document on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom invites views on whether new airport capacity should be provided in the South East over the next 30 years and, if so, how much; and on where any additional runway capacity should be provided. The Secretary of State will consider all consultation responses before taking decisions in the air transport White Paper which we plan to publish next year. The consultation document includes a chapter on the implications of growth for the safety of our airspace.

Handy Cross Junction

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make a statement on the renovation of Handy Cross junction. [71437]

Mr. Jamieson: As the hon. Member will be aware, on 19 August I announced that we intend to accelerate this scheme by including it in our Targeted Programme of Improvements. Subject to the satisfactory completion of the necessary procedures, works are programmed to start in 2005. I am pleased to announce that the Highways Agency has now placed a Contract Notice in the Official Journal of the European Community inviting expressions of interest for contractors to design and build the scheme.

Ports

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are taken to prevent a distortion of competition between existing ports in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic when applications are submitted for funding to the European Union and Her Majesty's Government from port authorities in the United Kingdom. [73399]

Mr. Jamieson: Where port authorities in the UK seek public funding, we undertake an assessment of the potential impact on traffic flows at other UK ports. Funding of ports in the Irish Republic is a matter for the Irish Government.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the level of use of European Union-assisted ferry port facilities in the United Kingdom. [73398]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific assessments have been made of the use of ferry port facilities that have received European Union assistance.

Shipping Industry

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many merchant ships were UK owned and registered in each year since 1997. [73386]

Mr. Jamieson: The size of the fleet in number of UK owned and UK Registered ships is given in the table:

As at 31 December	*UK Owned Fleet (All vessels)*	*UK Owned Fleet (*Trading vessels)*
1997	1,779	612
1998	1,770	616
1999	1,763	617
2000	1,793	624
2001	1,772	594
2002 (as at 30 June)	1,754	593

As at 31 December	*UK Registered Fleet (All vessels)*	*UK Registered Fleet (* Trading vessels)*
1997	1,498	369
1998	1,498	378
1999	1,456	379
2000	1,518	417
2001	1,527	427
2002 (as at 30 June)	1,562	451

Note:
* "Trading" vessels are those which carry cargo or passengers for commercial purposes. The remainder of the fleet consists of vessels, which are deemed to be "non-trading". Examples of non-trading vessels are dredgers and trawlers, but vessels which were constructed for "trading" purposes can also come into this category, if they have been converted to a non-trading use, e.g. storage or a floating restaurant.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures the Government have taken since 1997 to help increase the amount of UK-flagged tonnage in the merchant shipping industry. [73385]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have introduced tonnage tax. Together with the Maritime & Coastguard Agency's registration reforms, this has resulted in a substantial increase, of around 90 per cent., in the amount of UK-flagged tonnage in the merchant shipping industry.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions have taken place with NUMAST on *(a)* the health and safety of British seafarers and *(b)* the state of the UK shipping industry. [73388]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State met NUMAST to discuss cover by fire services at sea, social conditions on UK registered ships, and seafarer training.

Earlier this year, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State met NUMAST to discuss social conditions on UK registered ships.

The Chief Executive of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has also met NUMAST to discuss issues arising from the Report of the re-opened Formal Investigation into the loss of the *MV Derbyshire*.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were employed in the UK shipping industry in each year since 1997. [73387]

Mr. Jamieson: The best estimates of total active seafarers since 1997 are those produced by the London Guildhall University's "United Kingdom Seafarers Analysis 2001". These are given in the table:

Year	*Total Active Seafarers*
1997	29,610
1998	29,309
1999	28,085
2000	27,826
2001	25,188

The Government recognise the concern about the lack of a comprehensive, consistent approach to estimating the number of people resident in the UK with maritime skills, based on agreed definitions and assumptions. This includes information on those with maritime skills in posts ashore. My Department is therefore examining, with the industry, means of improving estimates of data.

Nuclear Waste

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many movements of spent nuclear fuel occurred in each year from 1997 *(a)* by air within UK airspace, *(b)* by sea within UK waters, *(c)* by rail and *(d)* by road. [73946]

Mr. Jamieson: This Department does not hold statistical information of the type requested.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what rules are in place to govern the safe transfer of nuclear waste between countries. [74594]

Mr. Jamieson: The rules covering sea and air transport of radioactive material are, respectively, the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code (Amendment 30–00) produced by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air, 2001–2002 Edition, produced by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO).

Within Europe, international road transport is covered by the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR), 2001 Edition, produced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Similarly, rail transport is covered by the Convention concerning International Carriage by Rail (COTIF) Appendix B. Uniform Rules concerning the Contract for International Carriage of Goods by Rail (CIM) Annex 1 Regulations concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail (RID), 2001 Edition.

All rules for the safe transport of radioactive materials are based on the Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials prepared by the International Atomic Energy Agency (the latest version being the 1996 Edition (revised)).

Thameslink 2000

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the Thameslink 2000 project. [74747]

Mr. Jamieson: Planning and associated applications are currently before the Deputy Prime Minister.

Transport Services (Taunton)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many transport *(a)* surveys and *(b)* studies underway cover Taunton. [74094]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are funding through the Highways Agency two studies covering Taunton and one survey (at various locations). Similar information of a much more localised nature would be available from Somerset County Council itself.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the *(a)* reliability and *(b)* punctuality of rail services between Taunton and (i) London, (ii) Aberdeen, (iii) Plymouth and (iv) Penzance. [74093]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority publishes performance statistics for all train operating companies every three months in *National Rail Trends* and every six months in *On Track*. The figures for each operator are not broken down to route level. Copies of these publications have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects new trains to be deployed on the Paddington to Bristol line in sufficient numbers to ensure that all Paddington to Taunton services use high-speed train sets. [74095]

Mr. Jamieson: The few remaining locomotive hauled (class 47) services to the west country were withdrawn with the introduction of the winter timetable on 29 September. Services are now provided by a

combination of High Speed Trains (HSTs) and new Class 180 Adelante trains, both of which are capable of speeds of 125mph.

British Transport Police

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many arrests were made by British Transport Police in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [73808]

Mr. Jamieson: The British Transport Police do not separately record numbers of arrests. They processed the following numbers of persons for allegedly committing offences:

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Number	36,607	39,832	38,119	32,300

The figures for 1997 are not readily available and were recorded using different Home Office rules that would not be comparable with the figures for subsequent years.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* other staff there were in the British Transport Police in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999 and (iv) 2000; and how many there are now. [73809]

Mr. Jamieson: The British Transport Police have provided me with the following information:

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Police Officers	2,132	2,095	2,113	2,091	2,109	2,123
Support Staff	461	492	524	523	565	644

West Coast Main Line

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the closure of the West Coast main line next year on Wilmslow; [74432]

(2) what discussions he has had with Railtrack and Network Rail on opening the branch railway line from Styal to Manchester during the closure of the West Coast main line next year; [74430]

(3) if he will list the persons and organisations consulted before his announcement that the West Coast main line will close next year. [74431]

Mr. Jamieson: These are matters for the Strategic Rail Authority. On 9 October, the SRA published for consultation their draft Strategy for delivering the modernisation of the West Coast Main Line. The Strategy includes consideration of alternative service patterns on sections of line when work is in progress.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total cost to public funds is of the West Coast Mainline upgrade to date. [73798]

Mr. Jamieson: No public funds have been expended specifically on the West Coast Main Line route modernisation project. However, to the extent that the estimated costs of the project have already been taken into account by the Rail Regulator in determining Railtrack's income requirements, an element of that income will have been supported by public funding to train operating companies using the line which has flowed through to Railtrack in the form of access charges, and by public funding for network grants paid to Railtrack.

Huntingdon–Oxford Train Service

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage the initiation of the train service between Huntingdon and Oxford. [74219]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority commissioned a study of the wider strategic options for services on the East-West corridor. This confirmed that viable options exist for services on the Oxford-Milton Keynes corridor, but found little evidence that services east of Bedford would be economically viable or provide value for money if supported by public funds. However, the SRA is exploring with Network Rail and other relevant parties options for keeping parts of the East-West route in railway ownership and safeguarding potential infrastructure alignments in the West Coast and East Coast Main Line upgrades.

Public Transport Assessment

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to undertake an assessment of the road and public transport infrastructure in London and the South East of England before the house-building programme announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review begins; and if he will make a statement. [73509]

Mr. Jamieson: We are working with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to develop its comprehensive long-term programme of action for building sustainable communities. Transport has an important role in this, and we will be working closely with regional and local partners to understand their particular transport needs as plans develop.

Disabled Access

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent changes have been made to public transport in the United Kingdom to ensure better access for disabled people. [74471]

Mr. Jamieson: We are using the powers in Part V of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to introduce regulations which will ensure that public transport is accessible to disabled people, including those who need to travel in a wheelchair.

The Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 1998 were the first to be made and affect all new passenger rolling stock entering service since 1 January 1999. Those regulations apply not only to rolling stock on mainline services, but also to light rail systems and underground systems.

Similar regulations—the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 2000—apply to new buses and coaches with a carrying capacity of more than 22 passengers which are used on local and scheduled services. Those regulations have applied since 31 December 2000. Different dates for compliance with the wheelchair access requirements have been set for different vehicle types, ie

For full size single and double deck buses—31 December 2000

For smaller buses and all coaches—1 January 2005

Separate dates have also been set for all vehicles to comply with the regulations, ie

For full size single deck buses—1 January 2016

For double deck buses—1 January 2017

For smaller buses—1 January 2015

For coaches—1 January 2020

The Act also makes provision for accessibility regulations to be made for licensed taxis. We are currently considering how best to take forward those provisions. In the meantime we have already introduced a requirement for taxi drivers to accept assistance dogs accompanying a disabled person and to carry those dogs free of charge. That requirement came into force on 31 March 2001.

Railways

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with rail companies on *(a)* the modernisation of trains and *(b)* the extension of services through the night. [74470]

Mr. Jamieson: None. These would be matters for the train operating companies to take forward with the Strategic Rail Authority.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of new railway have been constructed since 1997. [73956]

Mr. Jamieson: Annual figures for the renewal of the rail network are as follows:

Financial year	*Length of track in km*
1997–98	456 1)
1998–99	397 2)
1999–00	517 3)
2000–01	1064 4)
2001–02	983 5)

Sources:

1. Railtrack's 1998 Network Management Statement
2. Railtrack's 1999 Annual Reconciliation Statement
3. Railtrack's 2000 Annual Reconciliation Statement
4. Railtrack's 2001 Annual Return to the Rail Regulator
5. Railtrack's 2002 Annual Return to the Rail Regulator

Rail Complaints

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the change in the number of complaints to the Rail Passengers Council in the last 12 months. [73735]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Passengers Council (RPC) is required to publish an annual report to the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, whose responsibilities include protecting passenger rights. The overall number of complaints handled by the RPC between 2001 and 2002 rose by around 3 per cent., from 14,149 to 14,528. This increase was not uniform, with some areas, such as the Southern and Midlands regions, experiencing a fall in complaints. The main causes for complaints this year were train performance and service quality, redress and reimbursement and facilities and service at stations.

Railway Crime

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to tackle crime on the railways. [73807]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are committed to reduce crime and the fear of crime wherever it occurs in the transport system.

The British Transport Police work with the rail industry, local police forces and other agencies to deliver a safe railway environment free from disruption and the fear of crime. Our Policy Statement on Passenger Rail Franchising includes improvements in safety and personal security among the benefits the SRA might deliver through franchises.

We are involved in or support a number of specific initiatives including the Secure Stations Scheme, the National Route Crime Group, a pilot secure transport route along the Manchester (Victoria) to Clitheroe rail line and a joint project with the Strategic Rail Authority on ways to improve personal security in train travel.

Central Railways

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the latest report and advice from the SRA on Central Railways; and when it will be published. [74442]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has now delivered its report about Central Railways' proposals. Publication of the report will be a matter for the SRA.

Rail Operators (Cycles)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the rail operating companies that provide accommodation for cycles on *(a)* peak and *(b)* off-peak journeys; what the average number was of cycles carried per rail journey in 2001; what plans the Government have to increase the number of cycles carried by rail operators; and if he will make a statement. [73531]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) requires franchise operators to provide facilities for cycles on existing rolling stock subject to what is reasonably practicable given the type of rolling stock currently used and the nature of the service provided. In

accordance with Directions and Guidance from the Government the SRA is working with the operators to provide reasonable and secure facilities on board new rolling stock and at stations. The table below sets out which train operating companies provide accommodation for cycles on their peak and off-peak services. Information on the average number of cycles carried in 2001 is not available.

Train operating companies that provide accommodation for bicycles[1]

Train operating company	*Cycles accommodated in peak*[2]	*Cycles accommodated off-peak*
Anglia Railways Train Services	Yes	Yes
Arriva Trains Merseyside	Yes	Yes
Arriva Trains Northern	No	Yes
C2C	No	Yes
Central Trains	Most services	Most services
Chiltern Railway Co	Not on services to and from London or Birmingham Snow Hill	Yes
Connex	Not on services to and from London	Yes
First Great Eastern	Not on services to and from London	Yes
First Great Western	Yes	Yes
First North Western	Yes	Yes
Gatwick Express	Yes	Yes
GNER	Yes	Yes
Island Line	Yes	Yes
Midland Main Line	High Speed Trains only	Yes
ScotRail	Yes	Yes
Silverlink Train Services	Not on services between Wolverton and London	Yes
South Central	Not on services to and from London	Yes
South West Trains	Not on suburban services to and from London	Yes
Thameslink Rail	Not on services to, through or from London	Yes
Thames Trains	Not on services to and from London	Yes
Virgin Trains	Most services, except Virgin Train Rail Links	Most services, except Virgin Train Rail Links
WAGN Railway	Not on services between Finsbury Park and Moorgate or into Cambridge in the morning peak	Yes
Wales & Borders Trains	Not on some Valley Lines services	Yes
Wessex Trains	Not on services between Exmouth and Paignton—Exeter Central; Weston-Super-Mare and Bath Spa—Bristol Temple Meads/Filton Abbey Wood; Bristol Temple Meads—Bath Spa	Yes

Notes:
[1] On some services advance booking, limited spaces and charges may apply. Some operators do not accept tandems or tricycles. No restrictions usually apply to fully folded folding cycles.
[2] Peak services apply Monday–Friday excluding Bank Holidays, and the duration of peak hours varies between operators. Unless otherwise specified peak restrictions apply to services into the indicated terminal in the morning and out of that terminal in the evening.

Railway Consultations

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for statutory consultation between local authorities and rail authorities. [73792]

Mr. Jamieson: Section 206 of the Transport Act 2000 requires the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), in formulating its strategies, to consult the Scottish Ministers, the National Assembly for Wales, the Rail Regulator and other such persons as it thinks fit. Beyond this, the Secretary of State's Directions and Guidance to the SRA make clear that he expects the Authority to carry out the appropriate level of consultation with those likely to be affected by its actions. The SRA has also published its policy on consultation, which can be found on its website. We see no reason to impose further statutory consultation requirements on the SRA.

Virgin Trains

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take action to ensure that the benefit of compensation paid to Virgin Trains in respect of delays caused by failure of Railtrack infrastructure are passed to the passengers who have endured those delays. [73818]

Mr. Jamieson: Compensation to passengers for delays and cancellations to train services is covered by the Passenger's Charter which every franchised train operating company is required to publish and which applies to all train operators services on all routes. Any passengers who have been delayed and have made claims will have had their claims for compensation dealt with by Virgin Trains.

Vehicle Inspectorate/Traffic Area Network

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the proposed changes affecting the Vehicle Inspectorate and the Traffic Area Network are; if he will list the organisations consulted; if he will give the timetable for the integration of the computer systems of the two organisations, with the estimated cost; and if he will make a statement. [74345]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 23 July 2002 [*Official Report*, columns 964–65W]. In line with usual conventions regarding machinery of government changes, there was no consultation with external organisations prior to the announcement. Decisions on the structure of the new organisation, including the extent and speed of integration of its computer systems, will be made within

the context of the strategy for improved customer service across the agencies in the DVO group and the delivery of e-enabled services to the motorist.

Road Accidents

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road accidents have been attributed to the use by *(a)* car, *(b)* bus, *(c)* taxi, *(d)* coach drivers and *(e)* cyclists of a hand held mobile phone in each of the last three years, (i) in total and (ii) as a proportion of the total number of journeys by that group. [74244]

Mr. Jamieson: Information regarding the use of mobile phones is not recorded within national statistics on road accidents.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road accidents have been attributed to the use by tourist coach drivers of a hand held microphone in each of the last three years *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of the total number of journeys by this group. [74245]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not available.

A21

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents occurred on the A21 between *(a)* Lamberhurst and Flimwell and *(b)* Tonbridge and Pembury between January and June. [73338]

Mr. Jamieson: The figures requested are shown in the table:

Injury accidents on the A21: GB 2001

Location	*2001**	*2001[1]*
Lamberhurst—Flimwell[2]	2	4
Tonbridge—Pembury[3]	8	20

Notes:

* Data for January to June only

1. Complete year data.

2. Figures are taken between the junction with the B2169 near Scotney Castle and the north end of the dual carriageway at Flimwell.

3. Figures are taken between the junction with the A26 at Quarry Hill and the junction with A264.

Motorways

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to plant foliage on the central reservations of UK motorways. [74611]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency, responsible for motorways in England, has no plans to plant the majority of central reservations. Since 1990 central reservations have been designed and constructed as hard surfaced areas often with integral drainage channels and cable ducts for lighting. These areas are in a hostile environment which is subject to the effects of de-icing salt, turbulence and dust and not suited for growing plants.

Planting is considered viable only in wide central reservations where the total width is 10 metres or more and a healthy plant environment can be maintained. Where central reserve planting does exist in narrow central reserves there are high maintenance costs involving traffic management, replacement planting and pruning. These activities also result in delays to road users and potentially put operatives at risk from working close to live traffic.

M25

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the concrete surface of the M25 between junctions 8 and 9 is to be replaced with quieter materials. [74441]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter to Mr. Crispin Blunt from David York, dated 15 October 2002:

I have been asked by David Jamieson to reply to your recent question asking when the concrete surface of the M25 between junctions 8 and 9 is to be replaced with quieter materials. I am replying since Tim Matthews is currently away on business.

The surface of the M25 between junctions 8 and 9 will be replaced as part of the Government's commitment in the 10 Year Transport Plan to replace all concrete roads with quieter surfaces by 31 March 2011. This section of the M25 is not included in the current 3 year national resurfacing programme for the period 2001/04. The resurfacing programme for the remaining years of the Plan will be formulated as part of future Spending Reviews.

A556M

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if (1) he will make a statement on the proposed A556M; [74429]

(2) What consideration he has given to making Junction 20 of the M6 multi-directional. [74428]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter to Mr. George Osborne from Hillary Chipping, dated 15 October 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson has asked me to reply to your recent questions about plans for the A556 (M) and Junction 20 of the M6. I am replying in the absence of Tim Matthews, the Chief Executive who is currently away on Highways Agency business.

As you may be aware, the White Paper "A New Deal for Trunk Roads" published in July 1998, identified a need for the West Midlands to North West Conurbations Multi Modal Study (MIDMAN). As part of a combined package of transport solutions, the study has identified a number of highway improvements including widening the M6 Motorway to 4 lanes up to Junction 20 and re-modelling Junction 20 to make it multi-directional. A steering group made up of regional stakeholders, including the Highways Agency and the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA), has considered these improvements.

The Agency voiced their concern that the proposed Junction 20 improvements had not been adequately assessed against an alternative proposal to upgrade the A556 to motorway standard, which was considered as part of the A556/MIDMAN Study. The steering group therefore asked the Agency to carry out further technical work and report back to the NWRA. Subsequently, the Agency commissioned consultants to produce the A556 Area

Study, which concluded that the A556 (M) scheme should be taken forward in place of widening the M6 from Junction 19 to 20 and the Junction 20 improvements.

The Agency has now informed the NWRA of their conclusions. I understand that the NWRA considered the MIDMAN recommendations on 4 October and is in the process of making their views known to the Secretary of State. These and other issues will be considered by the Secretary of State and a formal announcement on the whole package of transport measures will be made in due course.

If you would like any further information about these issues, please contact the Highways Agency's Regional Manager for Network Strategy in the North West, Malcolm Roberts, at Sunley Tower, Piccadilly Plaza, Manchester, M1 4BE—Tel: 01619305668

Smoky Vehicle Hotline

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost to the Vehicles Inspectorate of operating the Smoky Vehicle Hotline was in each of the past four years; what the estimated cost is for the present year; and if he will make a statement. [74704]

Mr. Jamieson: The smoky vehicle hotline is one of several services provided by the Vehicle Inspectorate through its general enquiry unit. Hotline calls may also be made to the Inspectorate's area offices. For these reasons I cannot give an individual cost for the service. The costs are met within the total operational costs of the agency.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many complaints about smoky vehicles have been made to the Smoky Vehicle Hotline *(a)* in each of the past four years and *(b)* during 2002; [74706]

(2) how many vehicles were inspected by the Vehicles Inspectorate *(a)* in each of the last four years and *(b)* during the current year to date because of an unsatisfactory response by the licensed operator to a letter from the Inspectorate following a complaint to the Smoky Vehicle Hotline; [74705]

(3) how many licensed operators were written to by the Vehicles Inspectorate *(a)* in each of the last four years and *(b)* during 2002 following complaints reported to the Smoky Vehicle Hotline. [74707]

Mr. Jamieson: The table below shows the number of calls about smoky vehicles recorded by the Vehicle Inspectorate in each of the last four years and during the financial year to date. The number of calls actionable by the Inspectorate, that is those calls which relate to "O" licensed vehicles and which contain sufficient information for the vehicle and operator to be identified, are also shown. The Inspectorate does not record the number of vehicles inspected due to an unsatisfactory response to a letter from the Inspectorate following a complaint to the smoky vehicle hotline. However, this does not indicate that no action is taken. Follow-up action may take the form of a fleet check and this enforcement activity would be recorded separately.

Smoky vehicle hotline calls recorded by the Vehicle Inspectorate

Category	*April 2002–August 2002*	*01/02*	*00/01*	*99/00*	*98/99*
HGV	58	465	1,042	2,139	4,441
PSV	112	310	824	1,524	2,965
Other	74	304	656	743	1,693
Total	274	1,079	2,522	4,406	9,099
Of which calls actionable	151	469	1,405	2,611	—

Lighthouses

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has exercised his powers under Section 218 (2) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 to change the format of the General Lighthouse Fund's accounting records; what Accounts Direction he has issued to the General Lighthouse Fund on generally accepted accounting practice and additional disclosure requirements; and whether these requirements will be applied in the 2002 GLF report and Accounts. [73394]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State is responsible for the preparation of the General Lighthouse Fund Accounts. These accounts consolidate the accounts of the three General Lighthouse Authorities with those of the Fund. The format of the Accounts is agreed with the National Audit Office (NAO) having regard to generally accepted accounting policy and Treasury guidance. An accounts direction is under discussion with the NAO for agreement later this year. The 2002-03 accounts will be prepared to the new format.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the annual financial contribution in euros has been from the Irish Government under the terms of an agreement reached in 1985 for the sharing of certain costs incurred by the Commissioners of Irish Lights in the Republic of Ireland. [73395]

Mr. Jamieson: The contribution from the Irish Government in 2000/01 was 2,110,825 million euros and in 2001/02 is forecast to be 3,214,780 million euros.

The amount given is for each financial year, that is from April to March, and not each calendar year.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in discussions between the General Lighthouse Authorities and the Ministry of Defence on the transfer to the GLAs of the MoD's navigation buoys in the UK waters; and if he will make it his policy that the residual costs to the GLAs of maintaining the buoys be met by the MoD if the transfer takes place. [73397]

Mr. Jamieson: The maintenance and funding of the aids to navigation required by the Ministry of Defence is a matter for the Secretary of State for Defence. Under Section 197(8) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 as amended, the General Lighthouse authorities are

empowered to undertake buoy work for other bodies. Any agreement to carry out work for MOD or any other organisation would be subject to contractual negotiations. There are no plans to take on the MOD aids at the current time.

National Air Traffic Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the financial status of the NATS; when he expects the CAA to make a decision on the funding of NATS; what NATS have asked Her Majesty's Government to contribute; and if he will make a statement. [74468]

Mr. Spellar: I expect the CAA to publish and consult on its decision on the price cap review later this month. As a responsible shareholder, the Government working with the other parties concerned to prepare a package to ensure that NATS has a robust financial structure for the foreseeable future. The Government have said that they are prepared, on the appropriate terms, to match new private sector investment to this end.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions have taken place between his Department and the British Airports Authority on the possible investment by BAA in National Air Traffic Services. [74739]

Mr. Jamieson: The parties concerned are having continuing discussions about the financial position of National Air Traffic Services Ltd (NATS), including BAA's proposed investment in the company. I shall make an announcement in due course.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the level of National Air Traffic Services debt levels; and if he will make a statement. [73734]

Mr. Jamieson: As a responsible shareholder the Government, together with the other parties concerned, are preparing a package to ensure that NATS has a robust financial structure for the foreseeable future.

Airports

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the estimated cost is of the plans to add a new airport and increase the number of runways in the UK. [73728]

Mr. Jamieson: The series of consultation documents, *The Future of Air Transport in the United Kingdom*, published on 23 July 2002 set out a number of possible options for new airport capacity including a new airport near Cliffe in North Kent and other options for additional runways at existing south east airports, options in the Midlands for an additional runway at Birmingham and East Midlands airports or a possible a new airport (to replace Birmingham), and an option for a new runway at either Glasgow or Edinburgh airport. The estimated capital costs of each option (£ billion in today's prices), including where relevant the airport's share of associated road and rail access improvements, are:

	Number
Cliffe	11.5
Heathrow (one new runway)	4
Stansted (one, two or three new runways)	4–8
Birmingham	0.7–1.3
East Midlands	1.2
Midlands new site	6.9
Edinburgh	0.4
Glasgow	0.7

Not all these options would go forward, as many of them are alternatives. The purpose of the consultation process is to establish how much airport capacity is needed up to 2030 and where any new capacity should be located.

Airport Security

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he has taken to improve the security arrangements of private companies operating at the UK's airports. [74737]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is consulting with industry on the implementation of procedures for creating a list of approved providers of aviation security services. Such companies will have to meet certain criteria, set down by my Department, before they can deliver services at UK airports.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State Transport what measures he has taken or has planned for improving the arrangements for the security vetting of staff working in secure areas within the UK's airports. [74738]

Mr. Jamieson: Counter Terrorist Checks have been extended in relation to security staff, and a requirement for security managers to undergo such a check was introduced in May. My Department is also working to introduce Criminal Record Checks for all new and existing holders of permanent passes to airport restricted zones.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent action he has taken to review the security arrangements at UK airports. [74763]

Mr. Jamieson: Aviation security remains at an enhanced level following the attacks on 11 September last year. Many of the additional measures introduced by other states following those attacks had long been in place in the UK, but we nonetheless ordered an immediate review and identified a package of additional security measures, including for raising security on the ground at airports. These have been taken forward with the industry. In addition, my right hon. friends the Secretary of State for Transport and the Secretary of State for Home Affairs earlier this year commissioned Sir John Wheeler to conduct a study of airport security, including the threat from serious and organised crime, with particular reference to the role of the police service. Sir John's report was recently received, and is now being considered.

Airport security standards are kept under constant review, with my department's inspectors carrying out regular and frequent inspections to check and when necessary enforce them.

Alconbury Airfield

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the proposals concerning Alconbury Airfield set out in the national consultation, the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East, will be capable of being progressed in the event of him determining in favour of the planning application of ADL concerning the Alconbury Airfield. [74226]

Mr. Jamieson: *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* main consultation document is seeking views on a range of options, one of which is a small-scale airport development at Alconbury. Responses to this consultation will inform Minister's decisions on the policies to be published in the air transport White Paper.

It is inappropriate to comment on any planning appeal ahead of the Inspector's report and subsequent decisions.

Heathrow Airport

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many graves at Harmondsworth Church will need to be exhumed if the third runway is permitted at Heathrow Airport. [74735]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) is still subject to consultation.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the levels of compensation will be for those residents affected by the possible construction of a third runway at Heathrow *(a)* if their homes are demolished and *(b)* if their homes are affected by (i) noise and (ii) air pollution. [74736]

Mr. Jamieson: The principal Acts covering compulsory purchase and compensation are the Land Compensation Acts of 1961 and 1973, the Compulsory Purchase Act 1965 and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981.

For people whose property is required to allow for a proposed development, compensation is payable on the basis that they should be no worse off in financial terms after the acquisition than they were before. This means that they receive compensation for the value of their property based on its open market value if there had been no proposal to acquire their property compulsorily plus the reimbursement of any actual costs and losses incurred as a result of having to move.

In addition, both owner-occupiers and tenants who are displaced from their home as a result of a compulsory purchase, and have occupied the property as their main residence for a year or more, will be entitled to a home-loss payment. In the case of tenants this is currently £1,500 while owner-occupiers receive 10 per cent. of the value of their property subject to minimum and maximum thresholds which are currently set at £1,500 and £15,000. However both the flat rate payable to tenants and the thresholds for owner-occupiers are currently being reviewed, including proposals for increasing the payments above the present £15,000 ceiling. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published a consultation document about this on 27 September, inviting comments by 6 January 2003.

People whose property does not need to be demolished may be entitled to compensation to cover depreciation in the value of their land due to physical factors caused by the use of a development, such as noise, smell, smoke and fumes. In this case, compensation for the loss in value would be based upon prices current on the first claim day, which is 12 months after the first use of the public works.

In addition to these rules, the consultation on The Future Development of Air Transport in the South East is seeking views on additional mitigation and compensation measures for people who might suffer noise impacts as a result of an airport development option. These measures are outlined in paragraphs 16.49–16.58 of the main consultation document.

West Midlands Airport

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the grid references of the site identified to the South East of Worcester as a possible site for a new West Midlands airport. [74752]

Mr. Spellar: The Government is not putting forward for consultation any option for a new airport site in the Midlands other than that located between Rugby and Coventry, as detailed in "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: Midlands" consultation document.

The Government, having identified a potential need to develop further airport capacity in the Midlands over the next 30 years, had earlier appraised a number of locations throughout the Midlands against a range of criteria in a five stage process. Details of this process are available in the document "Preliminary Site Search of Options for New Airport Capacity to Serve the Midlands" and its appendices which can be found on the Department for Transport's website www.airconsult.gov.uk. The result of this process was that the option of a new site between Rugby and Coventry, and no other site in the Midlands, should be included in the consultation.

Airports (Scotland)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will include in his consultation on airports a proposal for an international air transport hub in Scotland. [73722]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's Consultation Document, "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: Scotland" seeks views on a number of important aspects of air services within Scotland including a niche hub serving Scotland and the future development of airports.

Severnside International Airport

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that the proposed Severnside International Airport will not be subject to consultation as a possible new airport. [74053]

Mr. Jamieson: Developers have prepared a proposal for a new single runway airport set in the Severn Estuary (Severnside). Our analysis suggests that a new airport there would only be viable if Cardiff or Bristol airport, or both, were to close or become congested to the point of capacity. Our forecasts under all scenarios indicate that this is unlikely to occur within the forecasting period. With the investment required to establish such a facility and with spare capacity available at Cardiff over the next 30 year period it is unlikely to be commercially viable in its own right and could only be considered as an option, if at all, for other policy reasons.

The Government will set out their conclusions in next year's White Paper on air transport. This White Paper will be informed by the current consultation on the future development of air transport in the United Kingdom.

Cliffe Airport

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the Department has to consult local residents in Southend, West on Cliffe Airport. [74511]

Mr. Jamieson: The *Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* consultation document was published on 23 July 2002. We recognise the importance of taking into account, and seeking to balance appropriately, the views of all interested parties before coming to the decisions which will be set out in the air transport White Paper.

To support the consultation process the Department for Transport has arranged a series of public exhibitions. To date exhibitions on the Cliffe airport option have been held at Basildon, Chatham and in two locations on the Hoo peninsula. I am also aware that a wide range of stakeholders have, or are in the process of, arranging events and meetings about this option. All responses to this consultation are welcome.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations his Department has held with Southend Borough Council with regard to the new airport at Cliffe. [74508]

Mr. Jamieson: Prior to publication of the *Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* consultation document on 23 July 2002 no discussions were held with Southend Borough Council, or any other local authority, regarding any of the airport development options.

Since publication we have been consulting with all those with an interest in any of the options, including local authorities.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether the Cliffe airport option cross-wind runway flight path would over-fly *(a)* Canvey Island and *(b)* Hadleigh; [74073]

(2) how often he estimates use would be made of the Cliffe airport option cross-wind runway if that option is adopted; [74070]

(3) if he plans to permit night use of the Cliffe airport option cross-wind runway; [74063]

(4) what his policy is on the fifth runway, with a flight path over Canvey Island and Leigh on Sea, included in the Cliffe Airport proposal. [74294]

Mr. Jamieson: Paragraph 11.4 of the *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* main consultation document makes clear that the option of a fifth runway to reduce night-time noise impacts was appraised.

This runway was considered for use only by night-time arrivals from the South-West, to avoid overflying towns such as Gravesend and Tilbury. The results of this analysis is presented in the SERAS *Stage Two Appraisal Findings report*, paragraphs 11.8.7 to 11.8.10. These suggest that, for movements other than arrivals from the South West, the night-time noise impacts would be minimised by using a combination of the parallel runways. Therefore overflying of neither Canvey Island nor Hadleigh is envisaged.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new rail links he plans for the proposed Cliffe airport option. [73520]

Mr. Jamieson: *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* main consultation document indicates in paragraphs 11.7 to 11.10 the type and scale of rail infrastructure that would be needed to connect the Cliffe airport option to the wider rail network.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the additional houses needed under the Cliffe airport option is over and above the targets for new house building set the Government for South Essex and North Kent. [74074]

Mr. Jamieson: *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* consultation document sets out in paragraph 11.29 that if the scale of housing development indicated in Regional Planning Guidance were rolled forward to 2030, it is considered likely that the airport employment needs could be met with fairly limited additional housing development.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will issue his white paper on airport capacity in the South East. [74296]

Mr. Jamieson: When the current consultation exercise is concluded at the end of November this year, the Secretary of State will consider all responses before taking decisions in the air transport White Paper which we plan to publish as early as possible next year.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport at what stage the road link between the A130 Benfleet and the Cliffe airport option would be built if that option goes ahead. [74072]

Mr. Jamieson: *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* consultation document makes clear in paragraph 11.13

that as the airport grows a second road crossing of the Thames to the A13/A130 at Benfleet could, in time, give better access to the labour market north of the Thames. At this stage, we have not attempted to identify precisely when such a link might be needed.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport at what point he estimates the proposed Benfleet Tunnel Crossing, connecting Essex with the possible Cliffe airport, will go underground *(a)* on the mainland near Sadlers Farm, *(b)* on North Canvey near Waterside Farm and *(c)* on South Canvey near Thorney Bay. [73571]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) analysis has not attempted to identify the location and design of highway connections for either the Cliffe option or any of the published options.

As is made clear in *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* consultation document (paragraph 11.13), a second road crossing of the Thames to the A13/A130 at Benfleet could, in time, be needed to give better access to the labour market north of the Thames.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport where the rail connection between the Tilbury Southend line and the possible Cliffe airport option would be sited. [74071]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) analysis has not attempted to identify the location and design of rail connections for either the Cliffe option or any of the published options.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the shortest distance is from the outer edge of the Cliffe airport option to each of the nearest communities. [74077]

Mr. Jamieson: Plan 11.5 in the South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) *Stage two Appraisal Findings (figures—chapter 11—Cliffe Marshes airport)* gives a clear indication of the proximity of local communities to the published option.

At this stage the location and scale of this, and all other published options, should be considered as indicative only. If any option is favoured in the air transport White Paper more detailed design and project definition will be required.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans there are for a new Thames road and rail crossing as part of the Cliffe airport option strategic infrastructure development. [73518]

Mr. Jamieson: *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* consultation document sets out in paragraph 11.8 that a multi-modal (road and rail) Thames Crossing is assumed to be in place to support Cliffe airport option. This link might be progressed irrespective of whether a new airport is built at Cliffe.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the species of birds and other wildlife that would be adversely affected by the Cliffe airport option. [74076]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the South East and East of England Regional Airports study (SERAS), an appraisal was made of direct and indirect effects arising from habitat loss, damage or disturbance to species and habitats arising from the construction, presence and operation of the proposed new airport option. This included an initial assessment of the impacts on birds and other wildlife. A summary of the methodology adopted is outlined in the *SERAS stage two appraisal findings report* (section 6.7). A more detailed statement is contained in *Environmental Appraisal Groups 2 and 3 report*. This also contains the detailed assessments relevant to the Cliffe option.

Specific to the Cliffe option, a preliminary assessment was made of the risk of birds colliding with aircraft. Details of this work are contained in the *North Kent Marshes Ecological study Phase 1*. Copies of all the above reports are available in the House libraries.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the impact of the Cliffe Airport proposal on *(a)* flood risks, *(b)* sea defences and *(c)* ground water levels for (i) Essex and (ii) Canvey Island; and on what (A) evidence and (B) studies and models his estimates are based; [74295]

(2) what analysis he has made of the change in flooding risk to Canvey Island and Benfleet, if the Cliffe airport platform is built in the Thames. [74069]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific analysis has been undertaken into the change in flooding risk to Canvey Island and Benfleet if the Cliffe airport option were to go ahead. If the Cliffe option were supported in the air transport White Paper, more detailed work into both the risk of flooding in the wider area and the measures required to counteract such a risk would be needed.

A summary of the appraisal methodology regarding the water environment is outlined in the *SERAS stage two appraisal findings report* (section 6.8). The results of this appraisal, relevant to the Cliffe option, are summarised in the South East airports consultation document (11.19–11.22) and shown in paragraphs 11.7.1 to 11.7.12 of the *SERAS stage two appraisal findings report*. Copies of all these reports are available in the Libraries of the House.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the estimated time scale for the planning, building and commissioning of the Cliffe airport option. [73517]

Mr. Jamieson: *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* main consultation document sets out on page 143 the key appraisal assumptions used in the analysis. The first new runway of any option (or the first two at Cliffe) was assumed to be open in 2011. Cliffe's third and fourth runways were assumed to be open in 2021.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what controls would be necessary to protect the Cliffe airport from birds; and what the *(a)* range and *(b)* extent of these controls is. [74075]

Mr. Jamieson: *The North Kent Marshes Ecological Study (phase 1 report)*, one of the South East and East of England Regional Air Services study supporting

reports, included a preliminary assessment of the risk of birds colliding with aircraft. This also included an overview of potential mitigation measures.

The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East) consultation document makes clear in paragraph 11.18 that the Department for Transport would commission further research to assess fully the risk and the best mitigating measures. This work is now underway and will be used to inform Ministers' decisions.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in which constituencies the 162,000 additional houses required by the Cliffe airport option would be built. [74065]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) identified, in broad terms, the scale of housing required, and urbanisation impacts, of all airport options. If any option is supported in the proposed air transport White Paper, the detailed urbanisation implications would need to be considered through the land-use planning system.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what strategic road infrastructure he plans as part of the proposed Cliffe airport option; and if this would form part of a new outer M25 project; [73519]

(2) if the proposed Benfleet tunnel crossing, associated with the Cliffe airport option, would be part of an outer M25 infrastructure; and if he will make a statement. [73715]

Mr. Jamieson: *The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)* main consultation document indicates in paragraphs 11.11 to 11.13 the type of road infrastructure that would be needed both to connect the Cliffe airport option to the strategic network and the type and scale of improvements that might be required on the strategic network as a result of the construction of an airport at Cliffe (if that were to go ahead). The airports study did not consider any broader highway issues.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the spoil from the Shellhaven port Thames dredging operations will be used to build up the platform needed for the full four-runway airport in the Cliffe option. [74064]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) analysis has not attempted to identify construction impacts to this level of detail. The appraisal methodology regarding construction impacts is contained in *SERAS Stage 2 Methodology report (section 7.8)*.

The results of this appraisal, relevant to the Cliffe option, are shown in the *SERAS Stage 2 Appraisal Summary tables* (table 11.13).

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what models have been tested to predict the changes in *(a)* ground water and flood levels and *(b)* hydrographic flaws, around and in Canvey Island and Benfleet, resulting from the Cliffe airport option. [74068]

Mr. Jamieson: No models have been used in the South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) analysis to predict changes in either ground water and flood levels or hydrographic flaws. A summary of the appraisal methodology regarding the water environment is outlined in the *SERAS stage two appraisal findings report* (section 6.8).

The results of this appraisal, relevant to the Cliffe option, are summarised in the South East airports consultation document (11.19–11.22) and shown in paragraphs 11.7.1 to 11.7.12 of the *SERAS stage two appraisal findings report*. Copies of all the above reports are available in the House libraries.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many lanes he expects the proposed Benfleet Tunnel crossing, associated with the Cliffe airport option, would have in each direction. [73570]

Mr. Jamieson: At this stage we have not attempted to identify details of either when such a scheme might be needed or the design and project definition.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will identify the previously developed land that would be used to provide additional housing in the event of the Cliffe airport option being adopted. [74067]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services study (SERAS) identified, in broad terms, the scale of housing required, and urbanisation impacts, of all airport options. If any option is supported in the proposed air transport White Paper, the detailed housing implications would need to be considered through the land-use planning system.

A more detailed assessment of the housing implications specific to the Cliffe airport option is set out in the *SERAS Land Use and Urbanisation study* (section A7). Copies of all the above reports are available in the House libraries.

IMO Convention

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further representations the Government will make to meet its pledge at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to encourage other Governments to ratify the International Maritime Organisation convention. [74616]

Mr. Jamieson: The World Summit on Sustainable Development's Plan of Implementation identifies the enhancement of maritime safety and protection of the marine environment from pollution as important objectives, and in this context makes reference—inter alia—to actions at all levels to invite States to ratify or accede to and implement the conventions and protocols and other relevant instruments of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) relating to the enhancement of maritime safety and protection of the marine environment from marine pollution and environmental damage caused by ships.

The majority of coastal and flag states are already parties to the Convention on the International Maritime Organization ("the IMO Convention"). The UK is

active in seeking to ensure that states meet their responsibilities in the fields of maritime safety, and environmental protection from shipping, at the IMO.

The UK will continue to be active, both in the forum of the EU and in that of the IMO, in encouraging other states to ratify and implement the IMO conventions which are of such importance to us and other maritime nations.

In particular, since June 2001 the UK has been active within the EU in promoting a strategy for implementation of IMO conventions to significantly improve the compensation arrangements following pollution from shipping and to improve response to marine pollution.

CABINET OFFICE

e-government

Derek Wyatt: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what plans he has to enable those in rural areas to access e-government [71404]

Mr. Alexander: Electronic delivery of Government services provides the opportunity to bring them together in a convenient way for users, particularly those who find travel difficult. Over half of Government services are already available electronically.

We are currently conducting a pilot—"UK online interactive"—through Digital Television. The service is currently available on the BSkyB platform, with work in progress to extend this to all platforms.

Terrorist Attacks

Mr. Wray: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent steps have been taken to bring Government departments together to take co-ordinated action in event of a terrorist attack. [74409]

Mr. Alexander: Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, the Government has conducted a wide ranging review of UK counter terrorist procedures and infrastructure, including physical and legislative measures to disrupt, deter and prevent terrorist activity. The Government's progress report "The United Kingdom and the Campaign against International Terrorism" published on 9 September, and placed in the library of the House, provides a summary of action taken to strengthen counter-terrorism measures within the UK.

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) was formed prior to the events of 11 September with a specific remit to co-ordinate improvements in civil emergency planning and since September 11 has been bringing departments and key organisations together to enhance preparedness for any major disruptive incident. This has included: working to designate lead departments for specific incidents, ensuring that they have satisfactory response plans and taking forward work towards a Civil Contingencies Bill. Further information on the preparedness of the UK to respond to a major terrorist attack can be found on the website maintained by the CCS at: http://www.ukresilience.info/home.htm

Mr. Wray: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent changes have been made in the areas of counter-terrorism and civil contingencies in event of a terrorist attack. [74408]

Mr. Alexander: The Government has established procedures for managing any terrorist incident, including the consequences. The response to any terrorist incident relies upon a co-ordinated approach and the Government draws upon the resources of relevant departments, the security and intelligence agencies, the police, the military, scientific and other specialist advice, local authorities and the emergency services. The UK crisis management machinery is based on a proven response capability, co-ordinated through the Cabinet Office. Each agency involved contributes its own specialist skills and resources to achieve an effective response and outcome to the incident.

To further enhance the capacity at the centre of Government to co-ordinate security, intelligence and consequence management matters and deal with risks and major emergencies should they arise, Sir David Omand KCB was appointed as Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office in June this year.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent resources have been provided for the CCS for central co-ordination and direction. [74410]

Mr. Alexander: None. The total administrative resource budget for the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the 2002–03 financial year is £6.9 million.

Intelligence and Security Co-ordinator

Mr. Wray: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the responsibilities are of the Intelligence and Security Co-ordinator at the Cabinet Office. [74411]

Mr. Alexander: Sir David Omand KCB was appointed as Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office in June this year. This new post was created to enhance the capacity at the centre of Government to co-ordinate security, intelligence and consequence management matters and deal with risks and major emergencies should they arise.

Sir David has taken from the Cabinet Secretary the following responsibilities:

Accounting Officer for the Single Intelligence Account (SIA)

Chairmanship of the Permanent Secretaries' Committee on the Intelligence Services (PSIS)

Chairmanship of the Official Committee on Security

Oversight of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and support for the Home Secretary in his role as Chairman of the Civil Contingencies Committee.

Sir David's appointment does not affect the statutory relationships between the Heads of the Intelligence Agencies and their Secretaries of State, nor the statutory sole responsibility of the Agency Heads for the direction

of the operations of their Agencies and their right of access to the Prime Minister.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Francois: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what resources the Government are allocating to emergency planning over one period covered by the Comprehensive Spending Review, broken down into annual budget totals. [73772]

Mr. Alexander: The Government has allocated £19.038 million Civil Defence Grant to local authorities in England and Wales for each of the years 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what steps Government is taking to prevent local authorities from spending emergency planning funds on other areas. [73775]

Mr. Alexander: The Civil Defence Grant provided to local authorities in England and Wales is a specific grant that must be used for emergency planning. The financial accounts of local authorities are audited to ensure this.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, for what reason the Government reduced the Civil Defence Grant budget for emergency planning in 2002. [73776]

Mr. Alexander: The Civil Defence Grant budget was not reduced for 2002–03. The Government allocated £18.97 million to local authorities in England and Wales for 2002–03, which was the same amount as in the previous year.

People's Panel

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what was *(a)* the total cost of the People's Panel, *(b)* the title, client and value of each project undertaken using the panel and *(c)* the amount paid to MORI under their contract with the Department in respect of the panel in each financial year from 1998–99 to 2000–01. [74496]

Mr. Alexander: The total cost of People's Panel research was £1,408,365. Details on the title, client and value of each research project undertaken and on the payments to MORI and others have been placed in the libraries of the House today.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the work of the People's Panel. [74495]

Mr. Alexander: Two independent evaluations were carried out—the first in 2000 and a second and final report which was published in July this year. Both were placed in the House libraries and are available on the Panel web site: http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page5627.as

Civil Service

Colin Pickthall: To ask the MCO how many *(a)* Civil Service posts and *(b)* departments have been devolved from London and the South East to other regions since 1997. [71402]

Mr. Alexander: In April 1997, there were 148,800 permanent Civil Service staff working in London and the South East. By April 2001, this had fallen to 144,550, representing a 1.4 per cent. reduction in the number of staff based in these areas. However, overall the remaining regions have seen an increase in the number of permanent Civil Service staff during the same period.

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by his Office since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within his Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [74672]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 29 January, *Official Report*, column 251W, by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will publish the Performance and Innovation Unit report on the review of sport. [74303]

Mr. Alexander: The joint Strategy Unit/DCMS report on sport will be published in due course.

EU Fixed-Term Workers Directive

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) if ministerial special advisers are fixed-term workers within the scope of the EU Fixed-Term Workers Directive; [73683]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of the EU Fixed Term Workers Directive on the employment of special advisers, with particular reference to the provision that fixed term contracts will become permanent after four years. [73819]

Mr. Alexander: Special advisers are temporary civil servants appointed under Article 3 of the Civil Service Order in Council 1995. The Government's view is that they cannot be employed on a permanent basis on the grounds that they have been recruited outside the Civil Service rules of fair and open competition, and they are not required to be politically impartial or serve a future Administration of a different political party. Special advisers are employed on fixed term contracts for the purposes of the Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 but the Government believes that special advisers' contracts cannot be converted to permanent ones by virtue of Regulation 8. Employing special advisers on a temporary basis is justified on objective grounds due to the special nature of their employment.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum seekers

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many dispersed asylum seekers are accommodated in Nottingham, broken down by the different housing sectors. [73688]

Beverley Hughes: Information is not available in the form requested.

As at the end of June 2002, 1,495* asylum seekers (including dependants) were being supported in the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation in Nottingham.

Information on the type of accommodation in which asylum seekers are housed is currently not available.

Statistics on the number of asylum seekers supported by NASS in each region are available on the Home Office's Immigration and Asylum Statistics website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

* Figures have been rounded to the nearest five.
Figures exclude cases where the asylum seekers support has been ceased.

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have applied for asylum in Scotland in the last 12 months; [73692]

(2) how many asylum seekers have had applications to remain in Scotland rejected in the last 12 months. [73677]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum seekers apply to be granted refugee status in the United Kingdom (UK) rather than specifically in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Asylum applications data are not available at regional level except by port (for those applications made at port—these accounted for 33 per cent. of applications in the period July 2001 to June 2002, inclusive). Corresponding information on initial decision outcomes relating to persons in particular areas of the UK is also not available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what support will be made available from public funds for asylum seekers whose applications have taken more than six months to determine and who are unable to take up employment as a result of the recent withdrawal of the employment concession; [74255]

(2) how many asylum seekers whose applications have taken more than six months to determine have taken advantage of the concession to take up employment in each of the past three years; what estimate he has made of the resulting impact on public funds; and if he will make a statement. [74254]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum seekers who are destitute can apply for support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Support can include the provision of accommodation and financial support. The amount of financial support varies according to the person's circumstances but the rates of support applicable from 8 April this year are as follows:

	Price
Person aged 18–24	£29.89
Person aged 25 or over	£37.77
Couple	£59.26
Lone Parent	£37.77
Child under 16	£33.50
Child aged 16 or 17	£32.50

Where accommodation is provided the costs of this, together with any associated utility bills and council tax is met centrally. Asylum seekers are also eligible for NHS treatment and may be eligible for free prescriptions, dental and optical services.

Children of compulsory school age here as part of an asylum seeking family are also entitled to attend school.

Information is not held centrally on the number of asylum seekers who were granted permission to work under the terms of the employment concession and this could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places will be provided in the further asylum accommodation centres proposed by his Department. [74509]

Beverley Hughes: We propose to provide approximately 3,000 places in the trial accommodation centres.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has set in terms of numbers for the level of pressure on local authorities' housing for those authorities not to be considered suitable locations for an asylum accommodation centre; and what the level of pressure on local authorities' housing is in each of *(a)* the proposed accommodation centre sites and *(b)* the other sites short-listed but not chosen. [74646]

Beverley Hughes: No such guidelines have been set. We do not envisage a demand on local authority housing as a consequence of those working or residing in an Accommodation Centre.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which sites for proposed asylum accommodation centres his ministers have visited; and when these visits were made. [74523]

Beverley Hughes: My officials and I visited the proposed sites at DSDC Bicester on 26 June 2002, at RAF Newton on 2 July 2002 and at Throckmorton Airfield, Pershore on 8 October 2002.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Scottish Executive will have the final decision in the consideration of planning permission for an asylum seeker accommodation centre at RAF Turnhouse. [74183]

Beverley Hughes: Planning proposals in Scotland are determined by the Scottish planning authorities and the Scottish Ministers.

If such a proposal for the Turnhouse site were to be pursued, it would be a matter for consideration by the City of Edinburgh Council in the first instance. If the Council were to object then the Home Office, as developer, would consider whether to refer the proposal to the Scottish Ministers for a final decision.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government are taking to identify potential sites for asylum seeker accommodation centres other than those already announced as under consideration. [74182]

Beverley Hughes: Site searching has continued since we made our initial announcement, as we said it would. We will not be putting into the public domain details of such sites unless and until they are considered to be a serious prospect for the siting of an accommodation centre.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what compensation will be made available to people living close to sites of asylum seeker accommodation centres. [74180]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) gave to the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1262W.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected in respect of Zimbabwean nationals since 1 January 2000. [73796]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the initial decisions of Zimbabweans claiming asylum, excluding dependants, from January 2000 to June 2002[1,2].

	Total Initial Decisions[3]	*Cases considered under normal procedures*[4]			*Backlog clearance exercise*[5]	
		Granted asylum	*Granted ELR*[7]	*Refused*	*Granted Asylum or ELR*[7] *under backlog criteria*	*Refused under backlog criteria*[6]
2000	595	20	10	525	35	5
2001[(p)]	2,105	115	45	1,950	-	-
January to June 2002[(p)]	2,310	645	55	1,610	-	-

Notes:
[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications received in the same period.
[3] Information is of initial decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[4] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[5] Cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog.
[6] Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds.
[7] ELR = exceptional leave to remain.
[(p)] Figures for 2001 and 2002 are provisional and subject to change.

Information on asylum applications and decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 29 November 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the backlog in asylum applications was at the end of each of the last 10 quarters for which figures are available. [74451]

Beverley Hughes: The number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision, as at the end of each of the last 10 quarters, is shown in the table.

Applications for asylum awaiting initial decision, Q1 2000–Q2 2002, principal applicants only

Year		
2000	Q1	114,600
	Q2	102,800
	Q3	96,900
	Q4	88,600
2001[(p)]	Q1	60,200
	Q2	47,800
	Q3	43,000
	Q4	38,800
2002[(p)]	Q1	34,800
	Q2	35,300

Notes:
Rounded to nearest 100
[(p)] provisional data

Information on the number of asylum cases awaiting an initial decision is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 29 November 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.htm.

Criminal Injuries Compensation (Children)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications by persons reaching the age of majority for a review of awards granted on application to the CICA/CICB by their parents in respect of sexual abuse suffered by them whilst children have been made in each of the last five years in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland; [72793]

(2) how many applications to the CICA for review of awards in respect of sexual abuse suffered by children made by persons reaching the age of majority have been successful in each of the last five years; [72794]

(3) how many applications to the CICA for review of awards made in respect of sexual abuse suffered by children made by them once they have reached the age of majority have been reviewed in each of the last five years. [72795]

Hilary Benn: There is no provision in the current tariff-based scheme, nor the common law damages scheme which preceded it, for the review of an award made and accepted on behalf of a child who had suffered

sexual abuse once the child reaches the age of majority. Consequently, since such cases lie outside the scope of the Scheme, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority does not collect data on this category of request.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used by the CICA in deciding whether an application for a review of an award made to a child who suffered sexual abuse can be reopened in each of the last five years. [72796]

Hilary Benn: Where an application has been finalised, the only circumstances in which it may be reopened are where there has been such a change in the victim's medical condition that an injustice would occur if the original decision were allowed to stand, or where the applicant has died as a result of the injury. In such circumstances, a case may be reopened more than two years after the date of the final decision, on the basis of evidence presented in support of the application to reopen, provided that it can be considered without a need for further extensive enquiries.

However, where a decision made previously has neither been accepted nor been the subject of a Review application, then an application for Review may be considered beyond the 90 day period specified in the Scheme, in exceptional circumstances where it is considered in the interests of justice to do so.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if it is his intention to institute a right of appeal for persons reaching the age of majority who make an application to the CICA/CICB for review of an award granted to them as a child when the application for such a review is refused by the authority; [72790]

(2) what plans he has to amend the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme in respect of children who have been sexually abused. [72791]

Hilary Benn: Following a major public consultation exercise launched in 1999, the Compensation Scheme was thoroughly reviewed in 2000, and a number of improvements were made which came into force from 1 April 2001. These included significant changes to the tariff descriptions and levels of award relating to the physical and sexual abuse of children. In view of that recent review and consequent changes, there are no plans for further amendment to the Scheme at this time.

New Deal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people employed by his Department under the New Deal for Young People in each of the last four years have subsequently *(a)* found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks and *(b)* returned to jobseeker's allowance or other benefits. [44913]

Beverley Hughes: Information is not held centrally on the number of New Dealers who have found unsubsidised employment for more than 13 weeks or who have returned to jobseekers' allowance or other benefits.

According to available records, one of the New Dealers employed by the core Home Office has left the department to work for a private employment agency, and one successfully applied for a permanent post via a Home Office external recruitment scheme.

Prison Service

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what businesses have employment links with prisons; and what role the Government plays in cultivating these links. [66649]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* The Prison Service has employment links with a wide range of businesses and other organisations. These include commercial contracts to supply goods and services, and providing employment for prisoners whilst in custody, including in engineering, woodwork, clothing, laundries and light assembly, which can lead to continued employment for prisoners on release. In addition, with our support and involvement the Prison Service is developing its wider links with employers, the Confederation of British Industry, other employer and industry organisations, and Sector Skills Councils to help increase the number of prisoners getting jobs after release. In particular, its Custody to Work initiative is focusing on sectors in which existing or developing prison work and training activity overlap with feasible job opportunities for released prisoners. These include construction, catering, industrial cleaning, warehousing and distribution, and call centres.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what education and training facilities are available in prisons; and what assistance is given to prisoners in getting a job on release. [66648]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 4 July 2002]:* Our aim is to provide learning opportunities for prisoners which will enhance their chances of getting a job on release and help them resettle back in the community. All prisons have to provide a core curriculum of basic skills, social and life skills, information technology and preparation for work and are expected to meet basic skills targets. We have recently widened these targets to enable prisons to be more responsive to the range of prisoners' needs.

Prisoners also have access to a range of vocational training courses, including construction, catering, industrial cleaning, motor mechanics, engineering and hairdressing. We are investing £20 million over the next two years to develop and modernise education and training so that it better fits the needs of the individual prisoner and the external employment market.

Many establishments provide services to help prisoners find employment on release, often in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the National Probation Service or voluntary sector organisations. These include jobsearch training and support, and the piloting in eight prisons from Summer 2002 of new technology giving access to Jobcentre Plus information on employment vacancies across the country. The Prison Service Custody to Work initiative, with £30 million earmarked for 2001-04, is geared towards increasing employment and training outcomes for released prisoners through the development of such resettlement activity.

In a survey in November and December 2001, 24 per cent. of sentenced prisoners nearing release said they had a job to go to on release and six per cent. a training place. A copy of Home Office Research Findings 173—"Jobs and homes: a survey of prisoners nearing release" is in the Library. These findings suggest we have discharged the commitment we made in Autumn 2000 to double the proportion of prisoners getting jobs on release against the 10 per cent. baseline suggested by previous research. We have now set the Prison Service a target of increasing by 1,700 by April 2003—from an estimated 26,500 to 28,200 a year—the number of prisoners getting jobs or education or training places after release.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners received university degrees in each of the last 10 years. [66238]

Hilary Benn: 133 prisoners have completed university degrees whilst in custody since 1991, and the numbers are broken down by year in this table.

1991–2001	*Number of prisoners received university degrees in prisons*
1991–92	15
1992–93	10
1993–94	9
1994–95	17
1995–96	14
1996–97	17
1997–98	17
1998–99	14
1999–2000	5
2000–01	15

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time spent by prison staff on training was during 2001–02. [66231]

Hilary Benn: Staff in prisons spent an average of 6.65 days each in staff training during 2001–02.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time out of cell was in 2001–02 in each prison establishment in England and Wales. [66234]

Hilary Benn The average time out of cell on weekdays and at weekends in each prison establishment in England and Wales during 2001–02 is given in the table.

Prison name	*Average weekday time out of cell 2001–02*	*Average weekend time out of cell 2001–02*
Acklington	10.3	8.8
Albany	9.3	7.5
Altcourse	10.1	10.1
Ashfield	12.0	12.0
Ashwell	15.5	15.5
Askham Grange	16.0	16.0
Aylesbury	8.0	5.9
Bedford	8.1	6.8
Belmarsh	5.8	4.1
Birmingham	7.9	7.2
Blakenhurst	10.1	9.4
Blantyre House	15.3	15.3
Blundeston	10.1	7.7
Brinsford	8.3	6.5
Bristol	7.8	6.2
Brixton	7.9	6.3
Brockhill	8.2	7.3
Buckley Hall	13.4	13.1
Bullingdon	8.9	6.7
Bullwood Hall	11.5	8.8
Camp Hill	10.3	10.3
Canterbury	8.5	7.7
Cardiff	8.9	5.9
Castington	10.0	9.2
Channings Wood	10.8	7.1
Chelmsford	9.7	8.3
Coldingley	12.3	10.2
Cookham Wood	10.5	8.5
Dartmoor	7.9	6.2
Deerbolt	8.0	5.4
Doncaster	11.4	11.4
Dorchester	11.3	11.2
Dovegate	0.0	0.0
Dover	8.4	7.6
Downview	10.8	10.4
Drake Hall	24.0	24.0
Durham	7.0	4.0
East Sutton Park	17.2	17.2
Eastwood Park	10.0	8.5
Elmley	8.1	7.9
Erlestoke	11.1	10.4
Everthorpe	11.0	7.9
Exeter	8.5	7.5
Featherstone	8.8	10.1
Feltham	8.0	7.5
Ford	13.3	13.3
Forest Bank	11.4	11.5
Foston Hall	10.3	9.1
Frankland	9.4	7.3
Full Sutton	9.5	7.5
Garth	10.0	7.5
Gartree	10.1	7.3
Glen Parva	5.8	3.5
Gloucester	8.7	5.0
Grendon	15.4	14.1
Guys Marsh	8.7	7.4
Haslar	11.2	10.8
Hatfield	13.5	13.5
Haverigg	11.8	11.8
Hewell Grange	24.0	24.0
High Down	8.3	5.9
Highpoint	8.8	8.8
Hindley	7.2	4.4
Hollesley Bay	0.0	0.0
Holloway	6.0	6.11
Holme House	5.7	5.1
Hull	7.6	5.7
Huntercombe	9.8	8.1
Kingston	11.8	7.7
Kirkham	13.5	13.0
Kirklevington	19.0	19.0
Lancaster	10.1	7.2
Lancaster Farms	7.8	5.1
Latchmere House	19.0	19.0
Leeds	8.6	7.7
Leicester	10.4	8.1
Lewes	9.2	6.6
Leyhill	23.3	23.3
Lincoln	10.5	9.0
Lindholme	11.7	9.6
Littlehey	9.3	8.4
Liverpool	6.9	4.1
Long Lartin	9.2	9.2
Low Newton	11.0	10.0
Lowdham Grange	12.4	12.4
Maidstone	10.4	8.0
Manchester	10.5	8.5
Moorland	9.0	5.7

Prison name	*Average weekday time out of cell 2001–02*	*Average weekend time out of cell 2001–02*
Morton Hall	15.0	15.5
Mount	7.8	7.0
New Hall	9.6	7.7
North Sea Camp	19.5	19.5
Northallerton	7.8	5.5
Norwich	8.6	7.6
Nottingham	9.1	5.0
Onley	8.9	6.8
Parc	9.7	9.9
Parkhurst	9.7	8.6
Pentonville	4.6	3.5
Portland	9.8	5.7
Preston	8.4	5.0
Ranby	13.4	12.5
Reading	8.3	7.1
Risley	11.0	10.5
Rochester	9.6	7.5
Rye Hill	0.0	0.0
Send	12.7	12.8
Shepton Mallet	10.5	9.0
Shrewsbury	10.0	10.5
Stafford	8.9	7.7
Standford Hill	24.0	24.0
Stocken	11.4	11.4
Stoke Heath	10.2	10.0
Styal	11.6	11.4
Sudbury	24.0	24.0
Swaleside	9.7	7.4
Swansea	9.3	8.2
Swinfen Hall	10.3	6.8
Thorn Cross	12.5	12.5
Usk	13.6	11.9
Verne	16.0	16.0
Wakefield	8.8	6.8
Wandsworth	7.2	7.6
Wayland	9.5	8.5
Wealstun	12.5	12.4
Weare	10.1	9.4
Wellingborough	10.0	7.8
Werrington	9.8	9.8
Wetherby	9.9	5.5
Whatton	12.8	12.5
Whitemoor	9.9	7.5
Winchester	8.6	6.4
Wolds	8.8	9.0
Woodhill	10.2	8.5
Wormwood Scrubs	8.5	6.9
Wymott	10.0	10.0

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on recent developments in the field of prison education. [74643]

Hilary Benn: The Government is making progress on its commitment to improve the quality and quantity of prison education by investing in the Prison Service's capacity to deliver, and by bringing prison education into line with mainstream initiatives.

We have set targets in basic and work-related skills and are on course to achieve them this year. We are investing £20 million in capital projects which will support improvements in education and training. We are also improving quality by implementing national standards through inspection and through support for establishments in planning. We are also introducing new approaches to learning: in basic skills and citizenship and through Learndirect.

Younger offenders we have introduced a new national specification for learning and skills which will significantly enhance provision for them both in custody and the community, and teaching and learning is now supported in the classroom by learning support assistants.

Armed Robberies, East Preston

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will visit the shopkeepers in East Preston, West Sussex, to discuss armed robberies at retail premises. [74765]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I have no plans to make a Ministerial visit to East Preston in the near future.

We are, however, aware that Arun Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership is actively engaged with the Traders Association and the local community to discuss and tackle the crime problems retailers in this area are facing.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many armed robberies have been recorded in East Preston, West Sussex, in the past two months. [74764]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is not available centrally.

Vandalism

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences involving acts of vandalism were committed by young people between the ages of 11 and 16 years in the last year for which figures are available. [74793]

Hilary Benn: Statistics of recorded crime do not include any details of offenders.

Offences involving acts of vandalism are not distinguishable from other offences of criminal damage on the Home Office Court Proceedings and Cautions Database.

Communications Data

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in relation to communications data, how many Immigration Service officials he estimates will be authorised to seek access to communications data and how many times officials have sought access to such data from communications providers such as Internet service providers under the Data Protection Act 1998 in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [74483]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Service has previously accessed communication data under the Data Protection Act 1998 through police Single Points of Contact. The Immigration Service did not retain a central register of the number of inquiries undertaken.

The Immigration Service is seeking to become a prescribed authority under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 Chapter II in order to access communications data. Once approved, any

immigration official investigating immigration related crime would be able to submit an application for communication data via a single point of contact.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the code of practice in relation to communications data; which public authorities will be able to have access to communications data; if he will make a statement on the support he has obtained from telecommunications companies for the concept of a voluntary code of practice to govern the access to communications data; whether he intends to use statutory powers to place access to communications data on a statutory footing; and if he will make a statement on the collective statement made by Data Protection Commissioners with regard to his proposals for the retention of communications data. [74584]

Mr. Blunkett: Communications data may be supplied voluntarily for specified purposes (e.g. investigation of crime) under the Data Protection Act 1998. A more tightly controlled regulatory regime for access to communications data will be provided for under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). Chapter II of Part I of the Act explains the duties and responsibilities placed upon each party involved in the process, and creates a system of safeguards reflecting Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). The overall regime will be subject to oversight by the Interception of Communications Commissioner.

The Chapter II provisions are subject to a statutory code of practice, a draft of which was published for public consultation during summer 2001. The code relates to the powers and duties conferred or imposed under Chapter II. It provides guidance on the procedures that must be followed before access to communications data can take place under those provisions. RIPA provides that the code is admissible in evidence in criminal and civil proceedings. We aim to implement the Chapter II provisions in 2003.

I will be bringing forward proposals in relation to any additional public authorities under Chapter II Part I of RIPA following detailed public consultation.

We are still in consultation with the communications service providers on the production of a voluntary code of practice to cover the retention of communications data by them under the Anti-terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001, and have noted the statement by the Data Protection Commissioners with regard to proposals on data retention.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders, Hertsmere

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been made in respect of residents of *(a)* Hertsmere and *(b)* Hertfordshire in each year since the inception of the orders. [74455]

Mr. Denham: An anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) is a civil order made by a court which currently can be applied for by a local authority or the police. The table shows the number of notifications received by the Home Office of ASBOs issued within Hertfordshire by local government authority up to March 2002.

We are aware that the number of ASBOs made locally have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Number of anti-social behaviour orders reported to the Home Office which have been issued as from 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2002 within Hertfordshire by local government authority

Area	*From 01-Apr-99 to 31-May-00*[1]	*From 01-Jun-00 to 31-Dec-00*	*From 01-Jan-01 to 31-Dec-01*	*From 01-Jan-02 to 31-Mar-02*	*Total*
Police Force Area / MCC[2]					
Hertfordshire	1	1	7	—	9
Local Government Authority					
Cheshunt BC	..	—	1	—	1
Stevenage BC	..	—	4	—	4
Three Rivers DC	..	—	2	—	2
Welwyn Hatfield DC	..	1	—	—	1

Notes:
1 Total figure only available for Hertfordshire police force area within this period. Local Government Authority not known.
2 MCC—Magistrates' Courts Committee area.
.. Not available.

Police, Hertsmere

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were in post in *(a)* Hertsmere and *(b)* Hertfordshire (i) on 1 May 1997, (ii) on 1 May 2001 and (iii) according to the most recent figures available. [74454]

Mr. Denham: Police strength information at force level is collected twice a year in March and September. The information requested for Hertfordshire Constabulary is set out in the table. The latest figures are for March 2002. Information for individual divisions/ basic command units is not collected centrally.

Following boundary changes on 1 April 2000, responsibility for policing some parts of the Metropolitan Police area was transferred to Hertfordshire. A number of Metropolitan Police Officers were seconded to Hertfordshire following this change. Many of these officers returned to the Metropolitan Police Service during 2001/2002 and this is reflected in the fall in strength between March 2001 and March 2002.

Year as at 31 March	*Hertfordshire Police Strength*
1997	1,759
2001	1,922
2002	1,825

Source:
Home Office Statistical Bulletins—Police Service Strength

Nazi War Criminals

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new measures have been taken since 1997 to ensure that alleged or indicted Nazi war criminals *(a)* have not visited and *(b)* are not now in the UK. [74744]

Beverley Hughes: No measures aimed specifically at alleged or indicted Nazi war criminals have been put in place since 1997. In our White Paper, Secure Borders, Safe Haven, the Government has made clear its intention to strengthen its ability to deal with suspected and convicted war criminals by:

Up-dating relevant immigration and nationality legislation

Ensuring better co-ordination between the Home Office and all other Departments and agencies who have an interest in this area.

Work is currently underway to achieve both of these commitments.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the UK Public Records to identify alleged or indicted Nazi war criminals living in the UK. [74745]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have no present plans to conduct a general review of public records to identify Nazi war criminals. However, the police will continue to consult public records where necessary to help them investigate individual cases.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what improvements have been made in international collaboration and exchanges of information between Government authorities, law enforcement agencies and archive centres on alleged or indicted Nazi war criminals since 1997. [74746]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: In June 2002, the European Union agreed to set up a network of contact points to exchange information to help investigate and prosecute suspected war criminals. A further instrument is being negotiated which would facilitate the exchange by Member States of information on war crimes held by their immigration authorities, to assist criminal investigations.

In addition, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate is developing increasing links with authorities in other countries enabling the informal exchange of information about war criminals generally.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contacts he maintains with Government agencies in Eastern Europe and South America about alleged or indicted Nazi war criminals living in the UK. [74751]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There are no regular contacts with authorities in those countries concerning Nazi war criminals living in the United Kingdom. However, the police have visited Eastern Europe as necessary when investigating individual cases, and European Union enlargement will bring a number of Eastern European countries into the European Union's arrangements for exchanging information on war criminals.

Personal Data

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have personal data relating to fingerprints or DNA stored on national police computers; and what percentage of these records relate to individuals who are *(a)* not criminals and *(b)* not suspected of any criminality. [74585]

Mr. Denham: On September 2002 the total number of profiles held on the National DNA Database was 1,884,450. Of these there were 55,032 profiles marked as acquitted. These were all taken under Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) from all those charged with or informed they will be reported for a recordable offence, but against whom the prosecution was not proceeded with or who were subsequently acquitted by the courts.

The total number of fingerprints on the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) was 5,213,106 on 3 October 2002. Currently if a prosecution is not proceeded with or a person is acquitted by the courts, the fingerprint record is weeded from NAFIS once the result is recorded on the Police National Computer. In light of the changes in the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, further proposals are under consideration in relation to the system to allow for the retention of fingerprints on NAFIS in such cases.

The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 changes to PACE have been subject to Judicial Review. On 12 September 2002 the Court of Appeal ruled on the cases of S & Marper *v.* Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police that the new legislation did not breach the European Convention on Human Rights.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the revised certificate he signed last December with respect to section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1998 has been used by the Security Service in relation to the disclosure of personal data to the Service; and if he will make a statement. [74583]

Mr. Blunkett: None in legal proceedings.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 12 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1306W outlining circumstances in which the Security Service might provide an explanation of the operation of section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1998 and a copy of the revised certificate.

ID Cards

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the response of the Information Commissioner to his consultation concerning his recent proposals for ID/entitlement cards; and if he will make a statement. [74485]

Beverley Hughes: In line with the Government's code of practice on written consultations, all comments received on the consultation paper published by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 3 July may be published unless the person or organisation submitting them asks for them not to be.

The consultation period closes on 10 January 2003. A response from the Information Commissioner has not yet been received. The Commissioner's office has confirmed that there would be no objection to placing a copy of its response in the Library and this will be done when it is received.

Immigration

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria his Department follows for *(a)* initiating deportation proceedings under the Immigration Act 1971 and *(b)* initiating denaturalisation proceedings under the British Nationality Act 1981. [74750]

Beverley Hughes: A person who is not a British citizen is liable to deportation on the grounds that this would be conducive to the public good, or if another person to whose family he belongs is being deported (limited to the spouse and any minor dependent children of the person being deported). He or she may also be deported following a recommendation made by a court under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1971.

Before any decision to deport is taken, all relevant factors are taken into account, including: age; length of residence in and strength of connections with the United Kingdom; personal history, including character, conduct and employment record; domestic circumstances; criminal record; compassionate circumstances; and any representations received on the person's behalf (paragraph 364–367 of the Immigration Rules (HC395 as amended)).

The criteria for deprivation of citizenship are set out in section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981. The grounds are that the person either obtained his nationality by fraud, has shown himself to be disloyal or disaffected towards Her Majesty, has unlawfully traded or communicated with an enemy in time of war, or has been sentenced within five years of becoming British to at least 12 months imprisonment.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the handling of the application for indefinite leave to remain by Irena Iotova Nikolova (C1059475) of Taunton. [74326]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate notified Mrs. Nikolova's representatives on 1 October 2002 that she had been granted indefinite leave to remain. A letter was enclosed apologising for both the delay in resolving her case and the administrative failures which resulted in the original application being erroneously refused. I echo those apologies.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the number of illegal refugees entering Britain in each of the last five years; [74486]

(2) What estimate he has made of the number of refugees who have *(a)* entered Britain illegally, *(b)* remained in Britain after being refused asylum and *(c)* been given exceptional leave to remain in Britain after their asylum application has failed in each of the last five years. [74395]

Beverley Hughes: The number of principal asylum applicants granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years is given in the table.

Year	*Grants of ELR*[1,2]	*Granted ELR under clearance backlog exercise*
1997	3,115	—
1998	3,910	—
1999	2,465	10,195
2000	11,475	10,020
2001[(p)]	21,175	—

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
1 includes reconsideration cases in 2000 or 2001 where an asylum decision by the Secretary of State is later required to be reconsidered as a result of additional information or significant changes in current circumstances and country information.
2 Data for 2000 may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
(p) Data are provisional and subject to change.

I regret that there are currently no estimates of the number of persons who have entered Britain illegally or remained in Britain after being refused asylum. The Research Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office has commissioned research to look at the methodology of sizing the illegal population and is due to report next year.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many organisations, broken down by region and nation, have been approved for registration or exemption by the office of the Immigration Service Commissioner. [74142]

Beverley Hughes: As of 1 October 2002, the number of organisations registered with, or exempted by, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) was as follows:

England	*Organisations registered with the OISC*	*Organisations exempted by the OISC*
Avon	1	8
Bedfordshire	2	10
Berkshire	4	10
Buckinghamshire	1	7
Cambridgeshire	0	8
Cheshire	1	9
Cleveland	0	5
Cornwall	1	8
County Durham	0	8
Cumbria	0	8
Derbyshire	1	7
Devon	0	13
Dorset	0	10
East Sussex	0	10
East Yorks	1	1
Essex	0	27
Gloucestershire	0	7
Hampshire	0	24
Herefordshire	0	1
Hertfordshire	1	17
Isle of Wight	0	1
Kent	1	26
Lancashire	8	46
Leicestershire	0	15
Lincolnshire	0	9
London	87	183

England	Organisations registered with the OISC	Organisations exempted by the OISC
Merseyside	1	22
Middlesex	13	14
Norfolk	0	10
North Humberside	0	2
North Yorkshire	0	10
Northamptonshire	0	10
Northumberland	0	7
Nottinghamshire	0	11
Oxfordshire	1	14
Shropshire	0	6
Somerset	0	5
South Humberside	0	2
South Yorkshire	0	24
Staffordshire	0	15
Suffolk	0	11
Surrey	10	29
Tyne & Wear	0	9
Warwickshire	0	7
West Midlands	9	27
West Sussex	0	11
West Yorkshire	3	24
Wiltshire	2	8
Worcestershire	0	6
Total	148	762

Northern Ireland	Organisations registered with the OISC	Organisations exempted by the OISC
County Antrim	1	16
County Down	1	7
County Armagh	0	3
County Tyrone	0	3
County Fermanagh	0	1
County Derry	0	1
Total	2	31

Scotland	Organisations registered with the OISC	Organisations exempted by the OISC
Aberdeen City	0	1
Aberdeenshire	0	1
Angus	0	3
Argyll & Bute	0	0
Clackmannanshire	0	0
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	0	4
Dumfries & Galloway	1	7
Dundee City	0	1
East Ayrshire	0	1
East Dunbartonshire	0	1
East Lothian	0	2
East Renfrewshire	0	1
Edinburgh City	0	10
Falkirk	0	3
Fife	0	0
Glasgow City	3	10
Highland	0	5
Inverclyde	0	0
Midlothian	0	3
Moray	0	1
North Ayrshire	0	6
North Lanarkshire	0	5
Orkney Islands	1	1
Perth & Kinross	0	2
Renfrewshire	0	1
Scottish Borders	0	4
Shetland Islands	0	1
South Ayrshire	0	0
South Lanarkshire	0	4
Stirling	0	2
West Dunbartonshire	0	2
West Lothian	0	0
Total	5	82

Wales	Organisations registered with the OISC	Organisations exempted by the OISC
Blaenau Gwent	0	1
Bridgend	0	1
Caerphilly	0	1
Cardiff	0	7
Carmarthenshire	0	3
Ceredigion	0	2
Conwy	0	1
Denbighshire	0	1
Flintshire	0	2
Isle of Anglesey	0	1
Merthyr Tydfil	0	1
Monmouthshire	0	4
Neath Port Talbot	0	3
Newport	1	2
Pembrokeshire	0	2
Powys	0	3
Rhondda Cynon Taff	0	3
Swansea	0	2
Torfaen	0	1
Vale of Glamorgan	0	3
Wrexham	0	1
Total	1	45

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the time limits on early clearance certificates placed in passports abroad start from when the visa is granted and is given an early clearance certificate stamp. [73793]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

From 2 October 2000, entry clearances have conferred leave to enter. Leave to enter the United Kingdom is considered to commence on the "valid from" date on the entry clearance and not from the date of arrival in the United Kingdom.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign visits have been made by special advisers in his Department in the last 12 months; and what the *(a)* destination and *(b)* cost of each visit was. [73886]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the replies my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, gave to the hon. Member for Chelmsford West, (Mr. Burns), on 9 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 891W, the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1494W and the hon. Member for West Marland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1478W.

Information for the period beyond March 2002 will be available in due course.

Marsham Street

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which refrigerant will be used in the air conditioning in his Department's new building in Marsham Street. [74758]

Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) on 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, column 35W.

Death Forms

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to require a practitioner other than the signatory to the death certificate to sign a cremation form; [73416]

(2) if he will introduce a requirement for post mortem examination when there is insufficient evidence relating to the nature of the illness suffered to complete a death certificate satisfactorily. [73418]

Hilary Benn: The appropriate processes for the investigation and certification of deaths are currently being explored by the review of coroner services, which is due to report next year. The Shipman Inquiry is also examining ways to make existing procedures more effective. We propose to consider what action might be taken in this regard in the light of the recommendations to be made by the review and the Inquiry in due course.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 5 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Sulayman Yunes. [74569]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 1 October 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 13 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ms S. Mohammed. [74567]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 16 September 2002.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to letters from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight dated 6 February, 18 March, 1 May, 9 May and 24 June concerning an application dated 20 June for leave to remain on the basis of a subsisting relationship. [73704]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member on 22 August 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

Ronald Biggs

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason Ronald Biggs was permitted to marry whilst serving a prison term. [73424]

Hilary Benn: Prisoners have a right to marry under the Marriage Act 1949, as amended. In Mr. Biggs' case, the status of the spouse as a foreign national did not affect this right; nor has the marriage altered this status.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many caseworkers were employed at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in Croydon in each year since 1997. [73925]

Beverley Hughes: Information identifying the number of caseworkers within the Integrated Casework Directorate (ICD) separately from other staff was not collected prior to 2001. The number of caseworkers in the ICD in Croydon since 2001 is as follows:

2001–910

2002–876 (this excludes 264 casework staff who transferred to the Immigration Service).

The following table shows the number of staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) in each year since 1997.

Year	*Staff numbers (headcount)*
April 1997	5,697
April 1998	5,160
April 1999	5,750
April 2000	6,582
April 2001	9,757
April 2002	10,878

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what refreshment provisions are available to members of the public when attending the Immigration and Nationality Department in Croydon. [74113]

Beverley Hughes: The refreshment needs of the Public Enquiry Office (PEO) Croydon first and second floors are currently served by 12 vending machines, six per floor. The machines on each floor offer a range of both hot and cold drinks while light snacks such as sandwiches, crisps and confectionery are available. There are a further four machines which serve the third and fourth floors—the Asylum Screening Unit (ASU) and Interview Booking Unit (IBU), each floor having two machines. All machines are checked regularly throughout the day and restocked as required. Callers to any of the units of the combined public offices have access to all vending machines.

Alcohol and Tobacco Consumption

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the rules are governing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco *(a)* on police premises, *(b)* in administration areas, *(c)* by police officers on duty outside police premises, *(d)* by staff on prison premises, *(e)* by prison officers on duty outside prisons, *(f)* by staff on fire service premises and *(g)* by fire staff on operational duties outside prisons. [74269]

Mr. Denham: For the Police Service, the Code of Conduct, appended to the Police (Conduct) Regulations 1999, states that, whilst on duty, police officers must be sober. The Code also states that officers should not

consume alcohol on duty unless specifically authorised to do so or it becomes necessary for the proper discharge of police duty. It is for chief officers to determine local policy on the consumption of alcohol and tobacco on police premises and in administration areas and on the consumption of tobacco by police officers on duty outside police premises.

The Prison Service's policy is that no person shall bring alcohol into a prison without the permission of the Governor. Staff are not permitted to consume alcohol whilst on duty, and it is a disciplinary offence to do so. Prison Service policy on smoking is contained in Instruction to Governors 16/1996, Work Place Smoking Policy (a copy of which can be found in the Library) and Governors are required to develop local policies which reflect the guidance in the Instruction. The Instruction advises Governors to impose a ban on smoking in office accommodation including single occupancy offices, corridors, staircases, etc. It does not, however, give advice regarding staff on duty outside prisons, but local policies should address that issue.

I understand from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that there is no centrally issued advice to the Fire Service addressing the consumption of alcohol or tobacco by staff on Fire Service premises or by staff on operational duties outside premises. However, under the Code of Conduct in the Fire Service (Discipline) Regulations 1985, it is an offence for an officer to be unfit for duty. The offence is defined in the Regulations as follows:

"Unfit for duty, which offence is committed where a member of a fire brigade renders himself unfit through drink or drugs or similar means for duties which he is or will be required to perform or which it is reasonable to foresee that he will have to perform".

Mr. Aiden Hulme

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for the prompt and effective medical treatment for the leg injury sustained prior to his arrest by Mr. Aiden Hulme, now a prisoner at Her Majesty's Prison, Belmarsh. [74270]

Hilary Benn: For reasons of medical confidentiality I am unable to disclose medical details related to any prisoner, but I am advised that Mr. Hulme is receiving the appropriate and necessary treatment for his condition. Belmarsh prison has well-established arrangements with hospitals in the local area and is able to call upon their services when appropriate. Prisoners receive medical treatment according to their individual needs.

Prisons (Internal Discipline)

Mr, McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with prison governors concerning implementation of the European Court of Human Rights' judgment on the protection of the right to a fair trial in relation to internal disciplinary procedures; and what measures he has taken for the adjustment of procedures to prevent violations. [74271]

Hilary Benn: I have had detailed discussions with the Director General of the Prison Service on the implications of the ruling for internal disciplinary procedures. On 14 August, following consultation with Governors, we laid before Parliament amendments to the Prison and Young Offender Rules. The changes strengthened some of the existing punishments, and also provided for independent adjudicators to hear the most serious cases. The adjudicators will be able to impose additional days as a punishment. Prisoners in hearings before the independent adjudicators will have a right to legal representation. Until the end of March 2003, the Lord Chancellor has agreed that District Judges may act as adjudicators. They began hearing cases on 7 October. We shall decide on longer term arrangements in the light of their work.

Plastic Baton Round

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was of the North Wales Police investigation into the effectiveness of the use of a plastic baton round on 27 February; and at what distance from the target the baton round was discharged. [74177]

Mr. Denham: As a result of the discharge of a baton round on 27 February, the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) supervised an investigation which was carried out by a senior officer in the North Wales Force. It concluded that the use and level of force on this occasion was proportionate and entirely justified. As a result of this investigation, a number of recommendations were made concerning the use of the baton round, all of which have been welcomed by the Force. North Wales Police inform me that the baton round was fired from approximately six metres (19ft/20ft) during the incident.

Motorway Service Stations

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes have been recorded as having taken place at motorway service stations in West Berkshire in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by *(a)* type of crime and *(b)* crimes occuring at Burghfield, Chieveley and Membury service stations separately; and what the overall figures is as a proportion of total crimes of each category in West Berkshire. [74251]

Mr. Denham: The requested information is not collected centrally.

Public Buildings

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what part designers and contractors play in the Home Office Action Plan for Better Public Buildings. [74354]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office Action Plan responds to the initiatives of Her Majesty's Treasury's "Achieving Excellence" and the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) "Rethinking Construction", along with the procurement strategies advocated by the Office of Government Commerce.

The Plan provides for a more structured approach to promoting good design as early as possible in the procurement process, whether it is through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or publicly funded. The outcome of this should be that designers are more carefully selected for their technical skills and capabilities, and contractors are engaged earlier to make a greater contribution to design and specification, and enabling greater value for money to be achieved.

Metropolitan Police Housing

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much Government grant has been received by the Metropolitan Police to house officers under the Government's Starter Homes Initative. [74505]

Mr. Denham: A £16 million Starter Home Initiative (SHI) grant has been allocated to Tower Homes, working in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police, to help some 550 police and key civilian staff in London to buy homes within reasonable travelling distance of their workplace. The grant is available up to March 2004.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what his policy is towards sales of section houses and other residential accommodation owned by the Metropolitan Police; [74506]

(2) how many section houses and other residential accommodation owned by the Metropolitan Police are for sale; and if he will make a statement. [74507]

Mr. Denham: Policy on the sale of police property is a matter for Police Authorities. Individual Authorities take all relevant factors into account when developing policies and making decisions on sales.

The Clerk to the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) informs me that the Authority's residential estate is primarily held as an aid to recruitment. Sales of properties are only undertaken when no other viable alternative exists for their continued retention in the residential portfolio.

The Clerk to the Metropolitan Police Authority informs me that one section house and three other properties in the MPA residential estate are currently being offered for sale.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan Police officers have been housed under the Government's Starter Homes Initative. [74504]

Mr. Denham: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that by 30 September 2002 39 police officers and three civilian support staff have found homes to purchase under the Starter Home Initiative scheme. 16 police officers and one civilian have completed their purchase or exchanged contracts prior to completion.

Ashfield Young Offenders Institution

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of staff at HMP 4 YOI Ashfield in post one year ago remain in post at the latest date for which figures are available. [74449]

Hilary Benn: On 30 September 2001, Premier Prisons had 242 staff in post at Ashfield prison and young offender institutions. On 30 September 2002, 177 (73 per cent.) of these staff were still in post.

Cybercrime

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to ratify the European Convention on Cybercrime. [74278]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: No timetable for United Kingdom ratification of the Council of Europe Cybercrime Convention has yet been set.

Terrorism

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment he has made of the risk to the UK of a terrorist attack; what counter-measures he has proposed; and what improvements have been made to strategic co-ordination and direction by central government. [74412]

Mr. Blunkett: The terrorist threat to the United Kingdom is monitored very closely and remains under constant review. The Government published on 9 September 2002 a progress report titled "The United Kingdom and the Campaign against International Terrorism". The report, which summarises measures taken within the UK to counter the terrorist threat since 11 September 2001 and the areas where the Government are planning to focus its future effort, can be accessed via the Cabinet Office website www.cabinet-office.gov.uk.

In October 2001, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister approved the establishment of a Ministerial Sub-Committee of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee to oversee the Government's role in the international coalition against terrorism. DOP(IT) Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy, Sub-Committee on International Terrorism—was set up with a remit to keep under review the Government's policy on international terrorism, in particular the political, military and humanitarian response to the attacks in the United States on 11 September and preventative security measures in the UK and overseas.

As part of this new Sub-Committee, the Prime Minister established a Ministerial Group, which I chair, to keep under review policy on protective security. DOP(IT)(T)—Ministerial Group on Protective and Preventative Security—was set up with a remit to keep under review the Government's policy on preventative and precautionary security measures to counter the threat of terrorism in the UK and to British interests overseas.

I also maintain oversight of the United Kingdom's capacity to respond to terrorist attack through my chairmanship of the Civil Contingencies Committee.

To further enhance the capacity at the centre of Government to co-ordinate security, intelligence and consequence management matters and deal with risks and major emergencies should they arise, Sir David Omand KCB was appointed as Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office in June this year.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the EU Co-ordination Group to promote uniformity of application of the general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas (first general system) is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [66456]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The last meeting of the EU Co-ordination Group on the General System Directives took place on 9 July 2002 and the date of the next meeting is to be confirmed, it is anticipated that it will take place before the end of the year. There are two directives under the General System—89/48 EEC (First Diploma Directive), the responsibility of DTI, and 92/51 (Second Diploma Directive), the responsibility of DfES.

The DTI Co-ordinator for Directive 89/48 EEC represents the UK at meetings of this Group. We liase with the devolved administrations on the application of the Directive. If an issue of particular relevance were to be put down for discussion at a meeting, in relation to Scottish qualifications, the UK Co-ordinator would liase with the Scottish Executive to discuss whether a Scottish official should attend. This has not been necessary to date.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the work of the learning and skills councils and the local councils. [74632]

Margaret Hodge: The LSC is in its second year of operation, and is making significant progress in meeting the learning needs of individuals, employers and the wider community. Participation and achievement levels have increased, and work is in hand to drive up quality in teaching and learning, and to broaden the range of provision available for learners. The LSC is expected to publish its annual report and a revised Corporate Plan later this year.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list in respect of each programme transferred to the Learning and Skills Council *(a)* the agency previously responsible, *(b)* the total resources allocated in 2000–01, *(c)* the total resources allocated for 2001–02 and *(d)* the estimated costs of administering the programme in 2000–01. [74107]

Margaret Hodge: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, columns 125–26W.

A-Levels

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students *(a)* sat A-level exams this year, *(b)* have completed a UCAS form and *(c)* have planned to defer their entry into higher education. [74626]

Margaret Hodge: The information is given in the table.

18 year olds sitting A levels and applying for HE

	Number
Students[1] sitting A Levels in 2002	200,000
Students[2] with 2 or more A levels applying via UCAS in 2002	141,000
of which, those accepting an HE place and deferring entry	17,000

Notes:
1 Aged 17 at August 31 2001
2 Aged 18 at September 30 2002. Latest figures as at October 3 2002. Figures rounded to the nearest thousand.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what steps she will be take to deliver the guarantee of a university place to those disqualified by inappropriate downgrading in A level examinations this year; [74692]

(2) if she plans to override the autonomy of selection by higher education institutions to fulfil her guarantee of a place for those students whose A levels were inappropriately downgraded. [74695]

Margaret Hodge: Universities UK, the representative body of universities, has already advised all its members to honour the offers they made prior to the publication of A-level results in August. If, as a result of the review, a student is now eligible to take up a place, they will be able to do so, either if possible this year, or in 2003.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much extra finance will be made available to higher education institutions to accommodate downgraded A level students; and whether maximum student numbers will be increased; [74691]

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much extra funding will be provided to higher education institutions who have to take extra students in *(a)* this academic year and *(b)* future academic years as a result of exam re-marking. [74624]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already made it clear that universities and higher education colleges will not suffer financial disadvantage in this financial year because of changes in student numbers due to regrading of A level marks. This commitment continues in to next year.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list when meetings took place between Ministers and officials of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, between 1 July and 31 August; and if she will place the minutes of each meeting in the Library. [74332]

Mr. Miliband: Ministers met officers of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority on 25 June, 18 July and on 7 August. All relevant notes were made available to Mike Tomlinson in the course of his inquiry into A-level standards.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is to a student of requesting a re-mark in an A-level exam with the *(a)* Oxford, Cambridge and RSA, *(b)* Edexcel and *(c)* Assessment and Qualifications Alliance boards. [74625]

Mr. Miliband: The cost of re-marks are usually borne by students' schools and colleges. The awarding bodies will not accept requests for re-marks from candidates, or their carers or from any third party, except in the case of private candidates. The awarding bodies offer a fast track re-mark service to be completed in 30 days, standard remarks should be completed within 40 calendar days. Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR); and the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance charge £20.80 for the re-mark of a specification unit under both the fast track and standard services. Edexcel charge £30 for a fast track re-mark of a specification unit and £25 for a standard re-mark. Schools are not invoiced until the outcome of a re-mark is known. They are only charged if the grade does not change.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students of the *(a)* Oxford, Cambridge and RSA, *(b)* Ed Excel and *(c)* Assessment and Qualifications Alliance boards had A-level papers re-marked (i) this year and (ii) in each year since 1997. [74620]

Mr. Miliband: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the awarding bodies usually collate information on candidate entries affected. We are seeking a breakdown on the basis requested, which will be placed in the House of Commons library in due course.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list contacts between her Department's officials and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority between 1 July and 31 August. [74353]

Mr. Miliband: As part of normal business, DfES officials met their QCA counterparts on over 150 occasions during July and August. Meetings covered a wide range of national curriculum qualifications and assessments issues. They also communicated in writing and by telephone.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many qualified A-level examiners were employed by the *(a)* Oxford, Cambridge and RSA, *(b)* Edexcel and *(c)* Assessment and Qualifications Alliance boards (i) this year and (ii) in each year since 1997. [74622]

Mr. Miliband: I set out below the number of qualified A-level examiners employed by each awarding body in the years in question.

Year	*Oxford, Cambridge and RSA*		*Edexcel*		*Assessment and Qualifications Alliance*	
	Legacy A level	*Curriculum 2000 AS/A2*	*Legacy A level*	*Curriculum 2000 AS/A2*	*Legacy A level*	*Curriculum 2000 AS/A2*
1997	1565		2368		n/a	
1998	2206		2468		n/a	
1999	2181		2578		n/a	
2000	1977		2789		5074	
2001	1828	3169	—	4255	—	7580
2002		5826		4863		7200

OCR was the only awarding body able to supply a breakdown between the examiners marking the legacy A level and the Curriculum 2000 assessments in 2001. AQA was unable to provide details of the examiners employed in the years 1997 to 1999.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many A-level papers of the *(a)* Oxford, Cambridge and RSA, *(b)* Edexcel and *(c)* Assessment and Qualifications Alliance boards were re-marked (i) this year and (ii) in each year since 1997. [74621]

Mr. Miliband: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, as regulator, monitors the performance of the awarding bodies and since 1999 has collated data on the basis of the number of enquiries and appeals processed. An enquiry could relate to the results for one unit of a modular A-level or one paper of a linear A-level or the overall results for all modular units or all linear A-level papers for an A-level examination. We are seeking a breakdown on the basis requested which will be placed in the Library in due course.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of students whose downgrading in A level examinations cost them a place at university this autumn who will be *(a)* accommodated with a place this year and *(b)* in subsequent years. [74693]

Margaret Hodge: Universities UK have advised their members that they should honour commitments made before August to all students who are entitled and wish to transfer after the regrading of their results. Where possible, students will be able to take up their place this year, but if not, entry will be offered for next year.

Universities

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment is made by her Department of the pastoral care system in British universities; and how the Department monitors it. [73349]

Margaret Hodge: A new system of academic review has just been introduced by the Quality Assurance Agency for universities in England. Under this system, students will be encouraged to comment on their learning experience including the quality of pastoral support. QAA reports will include both students' views and their own findings. In addition, as part of our drive to give students more say over their education, there will be institutional and national student satisfaction surveys that will include their views on quality of

pastoral support. The national surveys will be undertaken annually, from Autumn 2003 onwards, independently seeking the views of graduates. The Department has also recently undertaken a project to identify a range of effective approaches by Student Services. The project has been completed, and the results will be published in November.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which universities are allowed to set their own tuition fees; and what plans she has to extend the freedom for universities to set their own fees. [73383]

Margaret Hodge: The Government only controls the fee for undergraduate full-time courses at publicly funded higher education institutions. Privately funded institutions can set their own fee for these courses and all higher education institutions can set their own fees for post-graduate and part-time courses.

The ability to charge differential fees has been raised as an issue many times over the last decade as one way for universities to raise income, including in a recent report from the Education and Skills Select Committee. The Government will be publishing its response to the Committee's report alongside the HE strategy document later in the autumn.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact of rises in tuition fees on poorer people; and if a family with a large number of children wishing to attend university is entitled to a reduction in fees. [73384]

Margaret Hodge: Students from lower-income families do not make any contributions to their tuition fees and have not therefore been affected by their uprating since 1998/99 in line with inflation. Any parental contribution to fees and maintenance is assessed on the basis of parental income and is shared between those children in the same family who are eligible for student support. By dividing the parental income by the number of children who are currently attending university, the impact of tuition fees on families with a large number of children is fairly assessed.

16–19 Year Olds

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many 16 to 19-year-old students there were in *(a)* sixth form colleges and *(b)* further education colleges in each of the last three years. [73965]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The requested figures are given in the table below:

Enroled learners in England

		1998–1999	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*
Ages 16–19	Further education colleges	698,600	686,100	662,100
	Sixth form colleges	121,200	121,100	122,600
Unknown Age	Further education colleges	72,500	68,900	45,400
	Sixth form colleges	5,700	3,800	2,100
All ages	Further education colleges	3,510,600	3,541,500	3,469,000
	Sixth form colleges	210,400	221,100	215,500

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average per capita funding for 16–19 year olds in *(a)* schools and *(b)* sixth form colleges was in each of the last ten years; and what the projections are for the next three years following the Chancellor's spending review. [73914]

Mr. Miliband: Although sixth forms have not been funded separately prior to 2002–03, the table below gives an estimate of the average unit funding per sixth form pupil, obtained by taking age-weighted funding for such pupils and adding in other school-level and LEA central funding for secondary schools on a per capita basis. Figures for 2002–03 have not yet been calculated.

	95–96 Estimate	*96–97 Estimate*	*97–98 Estimate*	*98–99 Estimate*	*99–00 Estimate*	*00–01 Estimate*	*01–02 Estimate*
Unit funding (£)	3080	3200	3240	3370	3500	3890	4280

Projections for the next three years will not be available until the detailed 2003–06 Spending Review allocations are agreed in the autumn.

Information about sixth form colleges is not kept separately from FE colleges. The unit funding information on these is given in PQ 73961.

The unit funding figures for schools and FE colleges (including sixth form colleges) are not directly comparable, as they have not been calculated on the same basis. For example, the FE unit funding is for all pages and not just 16–19 as they are not available separately for this group.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average per capita funding for 16–19 year olds in further education colleges was in each of the last 10 years; and what the projections are for each of the next three years. [73961]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following figures represent total funding per full time equivalent student in FE colleges including sixth form colleges:

	93–94 Actual	94–95 Actual	95–96 Actual	96–97 Actual	97–98 Actual	98–99 Actual	99–00 Actual	00–01 Provisional	01–02 Provisional	02–03 Planned
Total unit of funding	3,210	3,170	3,040	3,050	3,070	3,120	3,440	3,540	3,810	4,090

These figures are for students of all ages, as the Department does not collect this information separately for the 16–19 age group.

Projections for the next three years will not be available until the detailed 2003–06 Spending Review allocations are agreed in the autumn.

These figures are not directly comparable with information on per capita funding in schools as they are not calculated on the same basis. The FE unit funding figure includes total public funding allocated for FE, while the schools' figures are based only on delegated funds and exclude other funding that schools receive centrally from LEAs that impact on post-16 students. The figure for 2002–03 includes reallocated funds made available to FE in 2002–03 including for the Success For All strategy and additional funding recently announced for the Teaching Pay Initiative.

Staff Vetting

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assurances *(a)* the Criminal Records Bureau and *(b)* Capita Plc gave that the backlog of applications would be cleared by the start of the school term; and if she will publish them; [74456]

(2) when her Department asked *(a)* the Criminal Records Bureau and *(b)* Capita Plc whether it would be possible to process applications by the start of the school term. [74457]

Mr. Miliband: Officials in my Department receive information about the performance of the CRB on a regular basis. When interim arrangements to allow people to be appointed in advance of receipt of a Disclosure were first introduced from 24 May, the letter to Local Education Authorities stated following advice from the CRB that: "the CRB are confident that their problems will be resolved and that all relevant Disclosures ....will have been issued before the start of the Autumn term." During June and July information provided by the CRB continued to indicate that they expected to clear the backlog of applications by the end of August, and to achieve the service standard of issuing Enhanced Disclosures within 3 weeks of receipt of the application by that point. During August it became increasingly uncertain whether the CRB would achieve that, and my officials enquired if the checks needed for staff at the beginning of term could be identified and given priority. In discussion with my officials on 21 August officials of the Bureau stated that they had identified approximately 22,500 outstanding applications for checks on education staff and were confident that the Bureau could clear most of these by 4 September, although it was possible that they might not be able to complete some where more information was required. Bureau officials also said that the actual checking process would be completed by the start of the new term, and that it would be possible to courier results to Local Education Authorities after 29 August. Further discussions took note of the range of different dates for the start of the new term, with 4 September the most common. Lists of term start-dates were requested from Local Education Authorities for the purpose of prioritising the processing of applications. On 27 August the CRB was asked to agree a form of words to be included in my Department's letter to Local Education Authorities, and agreed the following text:

"The Criminal Records Bureau is already targeting the checks that need to be cleared for education personnel on the basis of key word searches and the registration authorities that have sent them. Emergency action is in hand to ensure that as many as possible of these are cleared by 4 September, whilst ensuring there is no compromise in the integrity of the checks. In order to assist this process, and ensure that priority is given to those posts that will be most critical to the smooth running of schools in your LEA at the beginning of term, it is strongly recommended that each LEA provides the CRB with the following list of information as a matter of urgency, if you have not already done so:

(1) Name of LEA and number as a CRB registration authority

(2) Name, telephone number, and email address of key contact in the LEA

(3) Start of term date for pupils (we have already provided a full list for all LEAs in date order to CRB, but it will help to have this together with the other information)

(4) A list, with the name (first name, initial, surname), and CRB application number, of those individuals that the LEA regards as the highest priority for clearance for the beginning of term, in the light of the guidance given above. Please keep this as short as possible.

(5) A full list, with the name (first name, initial, surname) and CRB application number, of all those individuals for whom the LEA is still awaiting outcomes of checks. This can follow the priority list if not readily available."

My Department did not have direct contact with Capita PLC on these matters.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what proposals her Department has to reimburse schools the costs incurred as a result of delays by the Criminal Records Bureau in vetting staff before the commencement of the Autumn term; [74305]

(2) what steps are being taken to recover costs incurred by *(a)* schools and other educational institutions and *(b)* her Department as a result of failures by the Criminal Records Bureau and Capita plc to process applications prior to the start of the Autumn term; [74307]

(3) what assessment she has made of the cost to schools of additional supply staff needed as a result of the failure to complete Criminal Records Bureau checks by the start of the school term. [74311]

Mr. Miliband: We are currently considering representations we have received on behalf of schools about compensation for extra costs incurred as a result of delays by the CRB in issuing Disclosures. No decisions have been made as yet. We have asked a number of Local Education Authorities to provide estimates of the costs incurred by schools

My Department's officials are currently discussing with the Criminal Records Bureau a claim for compensation in respect of the costs incurred as a result of having to put in place arrangements to make checks of List 99 for schools and other employers and agencies.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance her Department issued to *(a)* the Criminal Records Bureau and *(b)* Capita plc regarding the relative priority to be accorded to checks on (i) teachers with continuous records of employment in UK schools and (ii) new applicants to teach in UK schools. [74308]

Mr. Miliband: None.

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by her Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within her Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [74675]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1129W in relation to part *(a)* of the question. The Information requested for the remaining could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Clitheroe Royal Grammar School

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will use her discretionary powers to award advanced status to Clitheroe Royal Grammar School. [73805]

Mr. Miliband: No, we propose to publish guidance in the Autumn and Clitheroe Royal Grammar School will be assessed against the criteria in the same way as any other school.

Infant and Primary Schools

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assessment her Department has made of the impact of phased admission to reception classes on children born in May, June, July and August; [74281]

(2) what consideration her Department has given to the provision of part-time teaching within a school environment at the beginning of the academic year for children who will not become five years old until the months of May, June, July and August. [74283]

Mr. Miliband: Admission arrangements for infant and primary schools, including the timing of admission to school, are matters for the admission authority. For most schools this is the Local Education Authority but for some it is the Governing Body.

Many schools which admit children before compulsory school age do so initially on a part-time basis, particularly for the younger four year olds. Although the Government has not specifically assessed the impact of phased or part-time intake to reception classes, in September 2001 we published a summary of independent research into the effects of children starting school at different ages. This reported that research on the school starting age and summer born children is inconclusive.

What is important is the quality of care and learning experiences very young children receive. Young children in reception classes receive provision, as part of the Foundation Stage, which is appropriate for their age and stage of development.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the local education authorities operating *(a)* a single fixed date of admission to reception classes and *(b)* a system of phased admission. [74280]

Mr. Miliband: Information on the pattern of admissions into schools is not collected centrally.

Admission authorities—the Local Education Authority for community and controlled schools (unless it has delegated authority to the governing body) and the governing body for foundation and aided schools—set their own admission arrangements, including how many pupils are to be admitted and when they are to be admitted. (Some infant schools admit children at the beginning of each term).

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes she plans to make to the level of London weighting to which teachers are entitled to address recruitment and retention problems. [74526]

Mr. Miliband: The School Teachers' Review Body will be making recommendations early next year to the Secretary of State on this and other pay matters. The Government is aware that some schools have difficulties in retaining good, experienced teachers in inner London. The Secretary of State has asked the Review Body to give special attention to that issue. The Government does not, however, support further high, across the board increases next year covering the London Allowance areas, though does not rule out an increase in line with inflation. The value of the allowance has already increased by over 35 per cent. since 1997. The recruitment and retention issues across the London Allowance areas are complex. Schools are best placed to use their existing pay flexibilities to target the teachers they need. In addition, Stephen Twigg has been appointed as Minister for London schools, and the Secretary of State will shortly be appointing a London Schools' Commissioner to work alongside him. Their work will naturally take account of teacher recruitment and retention issues in London.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the workforce is covered by sector skills councils. [74634]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are five Trailblazer Sector Skills Councils currently estimated to cover 15 per cent. of the UK workforce. Five further sectors are developing final proposals to become Sector Skills Councils. This is estimated to increase the proportion of the workforce covered by all Sector Skills Councils to 48 per cent., subject to these sectors being successful in receiving a licence and their proposed coverage being confirmed.

Youth Advice

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to consult *(a)* employers, *(b)* the CBI, *(c)* the Institute of Directors, *(d)* the Small Business Service and *(d)* sector skills councils on their role in delivering advice and guidance to young people. [73745]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In recognition of the key role we envisage that all of the above mentioned groups will have in supporting a successful 14–19 phase of education, all were invited to respond to the proposals in the 14–19 Green Paper—including the advice and guidance aspects—earlier this year. In the light of responses from key stakeholders, we will be announcing how we intend to take forward our proposals shortly.

We will be consulting into all key organisations in this area, including these groups, as we more further into the implementation phase of the proposals.

Schools (Taunton)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average teacher to pupil ratio in *(a)* primary school and *(b)* secondary school classes in Taunton was in each year since 1996. [74091]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is shown in the table.

Pupil:Teacher Ratio[1] in Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools in the Taunton Constituency
Position in January each year.

	Primary[2]	*Secondary[2]*
2002 (provisional)	22.0	18.7
2001	22.8	18.9
2000	23.9	18.6
1999	24.7	18.3
1998	24.5	17.9
1997	23.7	17.9
1996	.	.

Notes:
[1] The pupil:teacher ratio is calculated by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent pupils on roll in schools by the total number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers employed in schools.
[2] Includes middle schools as deemed
. Data is not available by parliamentary constituency prior to 1997.
Source:
Annual Schools Census

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* pupils, *(b)* teachers and *(c)* support staff there are in each school in the Taunton constituency at the end of the 2001–02 academic year; and if she will make a statement. [74092]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is shown in the table below. This relates to numbers of pupils published in the Primary and Secondary School Performance Tables for 2001. Otherwise, school level information is not routinely published.

Number of Pupils on Roll in Schools[1] in Taunton Constituency

Name of School	*Number on Roll*
Maintained Primary Schools	
Wellesley Park Primary School	373
Bishops Hull Primary School	245
Churchstanton Primary School	98
Lydeard St Lawrence Community Primary School	87
Milverton Community Primary School	206
Pitminster School	41
Sampford Arundel Community Primary School	82
Stawley Primary School	48
Halcon Community Primary School	135
North Town Community Primary School	387
Priorswood Primary School	219
Wellsprings Primary School	313
Beech Grove Primary School	318
West Buckland Community Primary School	69
Wiveliscombe Primary School	256
Parkfield Primary School	413
Lyngford Park Primary School	258
Oake and Bradford Community Primary School	64
Blackbrook Primary School	212
Holway Park Community Primary School	346
Bishops Lydeard Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School	256
Cheddon Fitzpaine Church of England Primary School	152
Creech St Michael Church of England Primary School	220
Hatch Beauchamp Church of England Primary School	42
Kingston St Mary Church of England Primary School	111
Langford Budville Church of England Primary School	72
North Curry CofE VC Primary School	131
Norton Fitzwarren Church of England Voluntary Controlled Community School	151
Nynehead Church of England Primary School	25
Rockwell Green Church of England Primary School	184
Staplegrove CofE Primary School	192
Stoke St Gregory Church of England Primary School	77
St Andrew's Church of England Primary School	245
West Monkton Church of England Primary School	217
Burrowbridge Church of England Primary School	25
Ruishton Church of England Primary School	182
Archbishop Cranmer Church of England Community Primary School	355
Holy Trinity CofE VA Primary School	304
Thurlbear Church of England Primary School	188
Trull Church of England VA Primary School	221
St George's Catholic School	201
Dulverton Middle and Community School	114
St John's Church of England Primary School	191
Maintained Secondary Schools	
Bishop Fox's Community School	787
Court Fields Community School	736
Heathfield Community School	1071

Number of Pupils on Roll in Schools[1] in Taunton Constituency

Name of School	*Number on Roll*
Kingsmead Community School	679
Ladymead Community School	767
The Castle School	1132
The St Augustine of Canterbury School	552
Special Schools	
Selworthy Special School	62

Note:
1 Only includes schools which have pupils eligible for Key Stage 2 tests or pupils aged 15 and for whom results are published in the Primary and Secondary Performance Tables. The Primary Performance Tables only include mainained primary schools with Key Stage 2 eligible pupils. Independent schools and infant schools are therefore excluded.
Source:
2001 Primary and Secondary Performance Tables

Electronic Credits

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much is to be allocated in each of the next three comprehensive spending reviews for electronic credits. [74133]

Estelle Morris: I will announce decisions on the allocation of funding available from the Spending Review 2002 later in the year.

Salisbury College

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about the financial position of Salisbury College. [72610]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Fingerprinting

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason children's fingerprints are being taken in school libraries; if they will be stored securely; when they will be destroyed; and if she will make a statement on the system being used. [73318]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: About 1,000 schools are using software provided by a company called Micro Librarian Systems (MLS), which gives purchasers an option to use thumb printing to identify individuals for the purposes of schools' library management systems. Key features of the prints are converted into a numerical code for recording on the system. MLS has given officials in the Department a demonstration of their software and we understand that, while the number could, with difficulty, be re-created, the original print itself is not stored and cannot be reconstructed.

The Office of the Information Commissioner have confirmed that they are of the view that the current use of the software developed by MLS is compatible with the principles of data protection, given the existence of safeguards against wider use of the thumb prints than is necessary for the purpose for which they are being collected in schools. The data should be deleted once a pupil leaves a school in accordance with the fifth principle of data protection that "personal data processed for any purpose or purposes shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes".

Ultimately, it is for schools to decide whether they wish to use this software or not and, if so, whether they wish to use the thumb print technology as part of it. If they do decide to use it, the OIC has stressed that schools should seek the consent of parents. We would add that schools should seek the consent of pupils where appropriate. MLS also strongly recommends in its literature to schools that they should contact parents to advise them of the technology and their intention to use it before beginning the registration process. In schools that do use the software with the thumb print option, there are alternative means of access for those pupils who choose, or whose parents choose, not to use the thumb print option, so they are not disadvantaged.

Private Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if, in respect of those provisions in the Education Bill which permit individual bodies of school governors to make contracts for the supply of educational services to schools with firms outside the public services, she plans to issue guidelines to local authorities and governors as to procedures to be adopted; and if such bodies will be subject to inspection by other statutory bodies. [74284]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills will make guidance available on sections 11 and 12 of the Education Act 2002 which allow school governing bodies to form companies to provide services and to procure goods and services. Guidance on purchasing for schools is already available separately from the Department. School companies will operate under the provisions of the Companies Acts and will submit audited accounts to Companies House. The regulations on school companies will provide for a supervising local education authority to receive accounts from the company and to request further information where necessary. School companies will not be subject to inspection by other statutory bodies.

Performance payments

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the differentials between performance payments for teachers in schools and further education colleges. [73719]

Mr. Miliband: Teachers in maintained schools are subject to national school teachers' pay and conditions based on recommendations made by the independent School Teachers' Review Body (STRB). Teachers at the top of the main pay scale can apply to "cross the performance threshold" by providing evidence of competency in five nationally agreed teaching standards. The aim of the performance threshold is to encourage and reward good teaching and to help make teaching a more effective and attractive profession. Passing the threshold means a permanent move to an "upper" pay scale. In practice, this mean a salary

increase of about £2,000. The criteria for moving through the upper pay scale is developed by individual schools.

FE colleges, including sixth form colleges, are run by independent corporations and unlike schools, there is no national pay agreement in the sector. There is a nationally recommended pay scale agreed by employer representative bodies and the unions but pay arrangements in the sector are diverse. This reflects colleges' ability to agree annual pay rises and conditions of employment with their staff in the context of local priorities and the overall resources available to them.

In consultation with the Association of Colleges, the Sixth Form Colleges' Employers' Forum and the FE unions we have introduced the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI) to help colleges modernise pay arrangements and to recruit, reward and retain teachers excellent teachers. For sixth form colleges, the arrangements for TPI (referred to as the Professional Standards Payment) are very similar to those in schools, with a prescribed payment of £2,000 to the eligible teachers who meet the required standards. In general FE colleges, there are national guidelines within which payments must be determined, rewarding the achievement of qualifications, continuous professional development, advanced practitioner status and measures to modernise pay arrangements. General FE colleges have the flexibility to determine the precise levels of TPI payment made to their staff. It is for individual colleges to decide whether to consolidate TPI awards into pensionable pay.

We have recently announced the extension of the TPI to non-teaching staff in colleges.

TECS

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list *(a)* the total sums made available by her Department or its predecessors to training and enterprise councils for their central administration costs and *(b)* the amounts spent by TECs on central administration, for each year from 1995-96 to 2000-01. [74100]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) on 24 July, *Official Report*, columns 1360W–64W.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance was given by her Department to Training and Enterprise on the virement of funds between the budgets allocated for work-based training for young people and adults, and those for central TEC administration in each year from 1995-96. [74102]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) on 24 July, *Official Report*, col. 1359W.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list *(a)* the total sums made available to training and enterprise councils and *(b)* the sums spent by TECs on work-based training for (i) young people and (ii) adults, and other Government-funded programmes, in each year from 1995-96. [74101]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) on 24 July, *Official Report*, col. 1356W–57W.

Physical Education

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what funding is being provided to the teacher training agency to ensure additional supplementary courses are offered at primary level in PE equivalent to those offered for secondary PGCE courses; [73937]

(2) what proportion of primary school teachers are trained to teach an effective PE and sports curriculum; and if she will make a statement. [73942]

Mr. Miliband: From September this year, all those training to be primary teachers receive training to teach PE as an integral part of their programme. This should ensure that more new primary teachers are suitably prepared to deliver the primary PE curriculum. Initial teacher training providers can also choose to offer trainees additional specialist training in PE or other subjects if they wish. However, the change in the requirements for primary teachers means that there should be no need for any supplementary courses of the kind offered for secondary teachers. These courses are aimed at providing graduates with the full range of knowledge and skills needed for the more specialised secondary PE curriculum.

Professional development also has an important role to play, and DfES and DCMS are working together to deliver a joint PSA target to enhance sporting opportunities for 5–16 year olds, by increasing the percentage of children who spend at least 2 hours a week on high quality PE and schools sport, within and beyond the curriculum, to 75 per cent. by 2006. Subject to final detailed decisions on the 2002 spending review settlement, we aim to support additional training for teachers and others in PE and school sport.

Year 12 Pupils

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many year 12 pupils are expected to be in full-time education in *(a)* September 2002 and *(b)* January 2003; and how many were in full-time education in (i) September 2001 and (ii) January 2002. [73708]

Mr. Miliband: Figures on participation in education are compiled using information available around the end of the calendar year, and that information relates to pupils by their age at the start of the academic year.

Provisional figures collected around the end of 2001 showed that there were 218,000 pupils aged 16 in schools and 232,000 in further education in England.

Projections indicate that there will be approximately 221,000 16 year olds in schools and 239,000 in further education around the end of 2002.

Performance Bonuses

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which schools have received a special achievement bonus in the past five years, broken down by region. [73850]

Mr. Miliband: School Achievement Awards were made for the first time in 2001. Details of the 2001 awards and those made in 2002 have been published on the Department's Teachernet website where the award winning schools are listed under each Government Office Region. (http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/Management/pay and performance/schoolachievementawards/)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what types of special achievement bonuses for schools are available; and what the criteria are for earning them; [73847]

(2) what plans she has to introduce further bonuses to encourage improving school performance. [73848]

Mr. Miliband: The Department's School Achievement Awards Scheme allocates £60million to our 7,000 best and most improving schools. Awards must be used to fund staff bonuses for which all staff, not just teachers, are eligible. They have been made for the second time this year and were awarded to schools:

where pupil performance in 2001 was substantially better than in 1998;

where pupil performance in 2001 was better than most schools in similar circumstances; and

that have come out of special measures in the 2000/01 school year.

Third round award-winners will be announced in Spring 2003. The scheme is separate from the financial support the Department gives to schools for threshold pay and performance related pay for teachers.

Assessment Test Scores

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average assessment test scores for secondary school students have been over the last five years, broken down by region. [73851]

Mr. Miliband: The following tables show the percentage of pupils who achieved level 5 or above in the Key Stage 3 tests in each Government Office Region in England between 1998 and 2002.

	1998			*1999*		
	English	*Maths*	*Science*	*English*	*Maths*	*Science*
North East	60	55	52	59	57	51
North West	65	58	54	63	60	53
Yorkshire and the Humber	61	57	53	61	59	52
East Midland	63	60	56	62	63	56
West Midland	62	56	53	63	59	51
East of England	66	64	60	65	67	60
London	62	52	49	60	56	48
South East	69	64	62	70	67	60
South West	67	63	60	67	66	59
England	65	59	56	64	62	55

	2000			*2001*		
	English	*Maths*	*Science*	*English*	*Maths*	*Science*
North East	61	61	56	63	63	63
North West	63	64	58	65	65	64
Yorkshire and the Humber	61	61	56	62	63	63
East Midland	63	66	61	63	67	67
West Midland	63	62	57	63	64	64
East of England	66	69	64	67	70	70
London	61	59	51	62	61	58
South East	68	69	64	69	70	71
South West	66	68	64	67	70	70
England	64	65	59	65	66	66

	2002		
	English	*Maths*	*Science*
North East	65	64	63
North West	67	66	65
Yorkshire and the Humber	64	64	64
East Midland	65	68	68
West Midland	65	65	65
East of England	67	70	70
London	63	63	61
South East	69	70	70
South West	68	70	70
England	66	67	66

Note:

2002 Government Office Region figures are "early statistics"

Internet Access

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding the Government provides towards promoting internet access in schools in the last year in classrooms; and what programmes the Government funds that promote the use of the internet. [73846]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government made available £245 million through the Standards Fund in the last financial year (2001–02) for information and communications technology (ICT) in schools. This includes funding for equipment and content as well as for the Internet. Statistics published on 29 August tell us that over 99 per cent. of all schools in England were connected to Internet at April 2002 and that computer to pupil ratios are now one computer for every six secondary school pupils and one computer for every 9.7 primary school pupils.

The main programme to promote the use of the Internet in schools over the last four years has been the National Grid for Learning strategy which is now part of the overall ICT in Schools Programme.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools broken down by region, have internet access. [73843]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information is not available.

It is estimated from a recent sample survey of schools that over 99 per cent. of both primary and secondary schools in England were connected to the internet at 31 March 2002. The sample size was not large enough to support regional estimates.

Information for England 2002 was published in Statistical First Release 19/02 "Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2002: Provisional", which is available on my Department's web-site www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics and from the Library.

Secondary Schools

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are in place to improve the secondary education of students and the recruitment of teachers. [73838]

Estelle Morris: *Investment for Reform*, published in July, sets out our intentions for reforming the secondary education system. A record £12.8 billion increase in education investment over the next 3 years, together with measures in the Education Act 2002 will provide a firm basis for further reform and improvement, and higher standards.

A range of measures has been introduced to boost teacher recruitment. From September 2000, £6,000 training bursaries have been paid to eligible students on postgraduate courses that lead to qualified teacher status. For those who train in and then go on to teach in shortage subject areas a £4,000 "golden hello" payment is made after induction has been completed. These measures helped to ensure that there were 29,045 new entrants to initial teacher training courses in 2001–02, more than any year since 1994 and 1,330 more than 2000–2001.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what tests are used to assess whether secondary schools are improving; and if she will make a statement on the methodology of these tests. [73839]

Mr. Miliband: Secondary school performance and improvement are assessed on a number of bases including the performance of their pupils in public examinations (GCSEs/GNVQs). Increasingly, we are also taking account of pupil performance in the end of Key Stage 3 tests, both in its own right and as an indicator of the "value added" by schools during Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The 2002 performance tables will include two value added measures for secondary schools nationally, in addition to the raw examination results published normally.

The principal means of assessing achievements at the end of compulsory education is the GCSE. GCSEs are assessed through a combination of coursework and terminal examination. GCSE specifications have to meet the requirements of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) subject criteria. A Code of Practice sets out the principles and practice for the assessment and quality assurance of the GCSE qualifications. It helps to ensure grading standards are constant in each subject across different awarding bodies and different specifications year on year.

The National Curriculum Key Stage 3 tests are developed by QCA on behalf of the Secretary of State. These tests provide a measure of pupils' progress in English mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3. They help teachers and parents to see what children have achieved compared with other children of the same age and with national standards, based on eight levels of attainment in the National Curriculum.

Exclusions

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children were excluded from state primary and secondary schools at each of the key stages in each of the last five years; and what percentage of each of these totals of exclusions children were recognised as being on the autistic spectrum. [73967]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The available information is shown in the table. Information collected centrally on permanent exclusions does not record the Key Stage of the pupil or the type of special educational need. Guidance from the Department makes clear that, other than in the most exceptional circumstances, schools should avoid permanently excluding pupils with statements of special educational needs. The guidance also requires head teachers to say, when reporting exclusions to Discipline Committees and Local Education Authorities whether the pupil has special educational needs, either with or without a statement.

Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools: Number of Permanent Exclusions by age of Pupils
England 1996/97–2000/01[1]

Primary Schools[2]	*Age of pupils*						*Total*
	3 and under	*4 to 6*	*7 to 10*	*11 to 13*	*14 to 15*	*16 and over*	
1996/1997							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	239	1,316	18	0	0	1,573
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[3]	0.0	15.2	83.7	1.1	0.0	0.0	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.01	0.06	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.04
1997/1998							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	210	1,317	12	0	0	1,539
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[3]	0.0	13.6	85.6	0.8	0.0	0.0	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.01	0.06	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.03
1998/1999							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	188	1,164	14	0	0	1,366
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[3]	0.0	13.8	85.2	1.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.03
1999/2000							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	152	1,039	35	0	0	1,226
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[3]	0.0	12.4	84.7	2.9	0.0	0.0	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.20	0.00	0.00	0.03
2000/2001 (1)							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	166	1,240	30	0	0	1,436
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[3]	0.0	11.6	86.4	2.1	0.0	0.0	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.18	0.00	0.00	0.03

Secondary Schools[2]	*Age of pupils*						*Total*
		3 and under	*4 to 6*	*7 to 10*	*11 to 13*	*14 to 15*	*16 and over*
1996/1997							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	0	56	4,727	5,500	180	10,463
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[4]	0.0	0.0	0.5	45.2	52.6	1.7	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.29	0.52	0.06	0.34
1997/1998							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	0	49	4,404	5,537	197	10,187
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[3]	0.0	0.0	0.5	43.2	54.4	1.9	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.27	0.53	0.06	0.33
1998/1999							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	0	59	4,075	4,393	109	8,636
Percentage of all permanent exclusions [3]	0.0	0.0	0.7	47.2	50.9	1.3	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.24	0.42	0.04	0.28
1999/2000							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	0	33	3,266	3,322	92	6,713
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[3]	0.0	0.0	0.5	48.7	49.5	1.4	100.0
Percentage of school population (4)	0	0	0.05	0.19	0.31	0.03	0.21
2000/2001 (1)							
Number of permanent exclusions	0	0	50	4,063	3,165	27	7,305
Percentage of all permanent exclusions[3]	0.0	0.0	0.7	55.6	43.3	0.4	100.0
Percentage of school population[4]	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.23	0.29	0.01	0.23

Notes:
[1] Permanent exclusions for 2000–01 are estimated as a number of LEAs have yet to confirm the data for their schools
[2] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[3] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the total number
[4] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of full and part-time pupils (excluding dually registered pupils in special schools) in January each year.
Source:
Annual Schools Census

Departmental Guidance (14 to 16-year olds)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer of 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1354W, when he will issue the published version of guidance on increased flexibility for 14 to 16-year-olds. [74743]

Mr. Miliband: The Department for Education and Skills and Learning and Skills Council's draft Guidance on Selected Legal Issues, as detailed in my answer of 24 July, is currently being revised in the light of comments made during an extensive consultation. The expectation is that a published version will be available in November 2002.

PFI Projects

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the PFI projects in maintained schools which have been approved, giving the value of each. [74518]

Mr. Miliband: 81 local education authority schools projects have been awarded PFI credits for new buildings or major refurbishments. Of these, 48 projects, covering 550 schools, have reached financial close, with a total capital value of £1.3 billion. Another 33 projects are in procurement, having been approved by the Treasury-chaired Project Review Group (PRG). These projects have a capital value of

£1.1 billion, and cover more than 250 schools. Details of these projects are given on the Department's website at www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolsprivatefinanceinitiative. A further 20 projects, covering more than 150 schools, have been awarded PFI credits on a provisional basis, and are currently preparing Outline Business Cases for consideration by the PRG.

Threshold Payments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of teachers who have successfully applied for threshold but who are awaiting payment as a result of delays in Government funding. [73742]

Mr. Miliband: The Department makes monthly threshold payments to local education authorities so that payments can be made to schools as soon as they return a funding claim form. Authorities are also able to make payments to schools or teachers before receiving payment from the Department. This means that there should not be delays in schools receiving the Threshold Grant.

Grammar School Ballots

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local authorities have been the subject of a request for electoral reform services for the petition threshold figure under the education (grammar school ballots) regulations 1998 in 2001–02; and what threshold figure was calculated for each local authority. [73916]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Bexley	8,829
Bournemouth	3,849
Buckinghamshire	17,159
Kent	*
Kingston-upon-Thames	3,433
Lancashire	request withdrawn
Lincolnshire	*
Medway Towns	10,533
Poole	3,766
Reading	3,679
Slough	4,563
Southend	5,946
Sutton	7,096
Torbay	4,310
Trafford	8,624
Wirral (Calday)	2,146
Wirral (County)	2,916
Wirral (St Anselm)	2,122

Note:
* ERS were unable to complete setting thresholds for Kent and Lincolnshire.

School Funding

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average per capita funding for schools was in each of the last 10 years; and what the projection is for the next three years. [73966]

Mr. Miliband: The per capita funding for schools in the last 10 years is set out in the table below. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills will determine the final schools projected per capita funding later in the year.

1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
£2,960	£2,940	£2,920	£2,830	£2,830	£2,830	£2,870	£2,990	£3,190	£3,390	£3,520

English Baccalaureate

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what preparatory work her Department has done for the introduction of an English baccalaureate; and if she will make a statement. [74351]

Mr. Miliband: In our Green Paper, 14–19: *extending opportunities, raising standards*, we sought views on a proposal for a new overarching award called the Matriculation Diploma. We have considered carefully the views expressed during the consultation on the Green Paper and will be making an announcement soon on how we intend to take forward our plans for the 14–19 phase.

Curriculum 2000

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the cost of ending the Curriculum 2000 exam systems; and if she will make a statement. [74352]

Mr. Miliband: We have made no estimate of this cost. The government believes that the greater breadth introduced in the post 16 curriculum by Curriculum 2000 is valuable, a view shared wholeheartedly according to the Tomlinson report.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she intends to reply to the letter regarding Pat McGuinness from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, addressed on 22 April to the Home Secretary and copied by the Home Secretary's Office to her. [73720]

Stephen Twigg: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, replied to the right hon. Member's letter of 22 April on 7 August 2002.

Youth Parliament

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much the Youth Parliament receives each year; and which minister takes lead responsibility for it. [73319]

Mr. Denham: The UK Youth Parliament is a registered charity, independent of Government. It receives financial support from a range of sources. The value each year of Government support, including grants, commercial contracts and support in kind, is as follows:

1999–2000: £12,000

2000–2001: £264,000

2001–2002: £84,000
2002–2003: £110,000

As the Minister for Young People, I take the lead in Government, in its relationship with the Youth Parliament.

Religious Education

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what figures she collates on the vacancies for trained religious education specialists in secondary schools. [73345]

Mr. Miliband: National Statistics published by my Department on 5 August show that, in January 2002, there were 90 vacancies for full-time teachers of religious education in maintained secondary schools in England.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many places for religious education specialists at teacher training institutions are unfilled; [73346]

(2) how many places on teacher training courses are set aside for training religious education specialists. [73347]

Mr. Miliband: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, made available 650 places on courses of initial training of teachers of Religious Education in 2001/02. Of those, 588 were filled. 700 training places will be available for Religious Education in 2002/03.

Primary Schools

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will amend the basic need criteria to facilitate the provision of primary schools within new neighbourhoods; and if she will make a statement. [74467]

Mr. Miliband: The Basic Need guidance for 2003–04 was issued on 30 July 2002, and the deadline for LEAs to submit their bids was 30 September 2002. Basic Need is defined as the requirement for additional school places in areas of population growth, where there is no more capacity in schools in the surrounding area.

We are currently undertaking a consultation on the future allocation of capital funding for new pupil places, with the aim of simplifying the process. Any new methodology, which should affect funding from 2004–05 onwards, should better support the expansion of successful and popular schools.

Comprehensive School

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evidence and related to which dates the old comprehensive schools involved *(a)* headteachers following orders, *(b)* teachers working alone, *(c)* school performance failure unchallenged and *(d)* accountability work as stated in her document Education & Skills: Investment for Reform, 5 July; and from what dates that model is derived. [74108]

Mr. Miliband: Under the original comprehensive system established in the 1960s, heads had neither the power nor often the resources to make their schools special. Schools were isolated, and teaching skills, the school curriculum and school improvement were not publicly scrutinised. There was no framework to measure the effectiveness of schools nor to ensure intervention to drive improvement where standards were unacceptable.

Significant policy initiatives introduced by this Government include: Excellence in Cities, which began in 1999 and is now operating in over a third of LEAs and having a positive affect on standards in those areas through partnerships and networks; intervention in inverse proportion to success leading to real action to tackle failing schools resulting in the number of failing secondary schools falling from 88 at the end of 1998 to 52 this summer; the expansion of the specialist schools programme as an engine for improvement—there are now almost 1,000 specialist schools covering 8 different specialisms compared to 181 schools in 2 specialisms in 1997; and a drive to improve leadership including the establishment of the National College for School Leadership, announced in 2000.

TECs

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of total expenditure on Government-funded programmes was represented by central administration costs in respect of each training and enterprise council for 2000–01; and to what extent the sums spent on central administration represented value for money. [74104]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) on 24 July, *Official Report*, col. 1360W–364W.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much in each year from 1995–96 her Department consented to be transferred by training and enterprise councils between budget heads, showing for each budget head the total amount transferred out and the heads to which it was transferred. [74103]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) on 24 July, *Official Report*, col. 1359W.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff were *(a)* employed at the end of 1999–2000, *(b)* transferred to the Learning and Skills Council, *(c)* transferred to the Small Business Service, *(d)* transferred to Business Links, *(e)* transferred to other organisations and *(f)* made redundant by each TEC prior to 31 March 2001. [74105]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, col. 1357W–359W.

Teachers

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her reply to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham of 9 July 2002,

Official Report, column 820W, if she will list for each school the number of teachers; and if she will make a statement. [73718]

Mr. Miliband: It is the Department's policy not to publish figures about individual schools unless the schools concerned have had the opportunity to check or confirm that information. The pupil figures provided in the reply given on 9 July, *Official Report*, column 820W were published as part of the Primary and Secondary School Performance Tables; these figures had been checked by the schools. Teacher numbers are, however, not routinely checked with schools.

Capita

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps were taken by her Department following the suspension of the individual learning account scheme to ensure that services provided to it by Capita plc and its subsidiaries would be provided to an acceptable standard. [74304]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Officials continue to take seriously their responsibilities as managers of the Department's contracts, not only with Capita but with all our delivery partners. As soon as we became aware of the issues emerging from Individual Learning Accounts we took immediate steps to ensure that they did not apply to any of the Department's other contracts with any of our delivery partners. We have also taken further steps to ensure that ongoing assessment of the risks associated with delivery of contracted outputs is a standard part of what the Department's contract managers do. A comprehensive and wide ranging Supplier Management Project is seeking to embed that commercial competence across the Department as a whole and is one of our key improvement priorities.

Departmental Research

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the current research commissioned by her Department in the fields of further and higher education and vocational training. [74629]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department's research programme currently supports 19 projects in the fields of further and higher education and vocational training. Details of the projects are noted below:

Research on the Relationship between Training and Business Performance
FE Students' Financial Circumstances
Learning and Training at Work 2001 and 2002
National Adult Learning Survey 2002
Evaluation of the CMF-Funded UK Online Centres
Early impact of the new arrangements for Adult and Community Learning under the Learning and Skills Council
National Survey of Adult Basic Skill Needs
Longitudinal Panel Survey of Learners
Evaluation of Adult Basic Skills Pathfinder Extension Activities
JSA Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills Pilots
Key Issues in Higher Education
Evaluation of Connexions Card
Evaluation of Playing for Success
Evaluation of the Neighbourhood Support Fund
Survey of Connexions Costs in Urban and Rural Settings
Connexions Customer Satisfaction Survey
Connexions Stakeholder Survey
Ethnic minorities and HE
Key Issues in HE.

In addition the Department also funds 4 research centres whose activities will cover the areas noted above. These are:

Wider Benefits of Learning
Economics of Education
Information Communication Technology
National Research And Development Centre For Adult Literacy And Numeracy.

University of Industry

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the role of the University of Industry in relation to other *(a)* providers and *(b)* strategic policy bodies in connection with vocational education. [74633]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Ufi was set up to stimulate demand for lifelong learning amongst businesses and individuals and to promote the availability of high quality learning materials and innovative learning methods, particularly through the use of Information and Communication Technologies. It uses the brand name learndirect.

Ufi contracts for the delivery of learndirect courses in over 1700 centres across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Partners include further education colleges, private and voluntary sector providers, employers, trade unions and others. In England the Learning and Skills Council funds learning delivered in these centres. Ufi works closely with this Department and with the LSC, and a wide range of other partners, in pursuit of the effective delivery of its objectives. We have recently begun a review of the relationship between Ufi/learndirect and the DfES in order to agree the most effective long term basis for its future development

Connexions Service

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has for quality accreditation processes to ensure that all young people receive high quality one-to-one information, advice and guidance in schools, colleges and the workplace. [73743]

Stephen Twigg: The Connexions Service has responsibility for working with schools, colleges and work-based training providers to ensure young people aged 13–19 have access to information, advice and guidance. Young people can access a wide range of support including one to one support from Personal Advisers.

The Connexions Service is delivered by Connexions Partnerships operating in 47 areas in England. Each Partnership is responsible for meeting key requirements and quality criteria developed by the Connexions Service National Unit and OFSTED. On an annual basis each Partnership undertakes a self assessment of its work and this forms the basis of performance reviews with the Connexions Service National Unit. Once every four years OFSTED will also undertake a full inspection in each Connexions Partnership area. Work is also underway to develop a national non-statutory

specification for careers education and guidance. The specification will help schools, colleges and work-based training providers improve the quality of support they provide to young people.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals she has to enable the Connexions Service to meet individual needs for guidance for young people arising from the Government's 14 to 19 policies. [73744]

Stephen Twigg: The Connexions Service will continue to provide access to impartial advice and guidance on learning and career options for all young people aged 13–19, through: individual and group sessions with a Connexions Personal Adviser; a wide range of careers information products; and through Information and Communication Technology.

In recognition of the broader range of learning pathways that will become available as a result of the proposed 14–19 reforms, the Connexions Service will work with schools to review progress with young people and their parents or carers at the end of Key Stage 3. This will inform young people's specific learning choices for Key Stage 4 and broad learning goals for the post-16 phase, as well as identifying opportunities for young people to undertake wider development opportunities. The focus of activity for the Connexions Service will be to provide individually tailored support to young people undertaking learning programmes that involve studying outside the institution in which they are based and those with multiple barriers to learning. We are also developing a new 11–19 national specification for careers education, to help schools, colleges and work-based training providers to develop more effective curriculum-based careers education programmes.

GCSE Grades

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average percentage of pupils was obtaining five GCSE A*-C grades or above in *(a)* specialist schools designated before 1 September 1997, *(b)* specialist schools designated after September 1997 and *(c)* all schools in each of the last five years. [73968]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information is shown in the following table.

Average [1] percentage of pupils obtaining 5 GCSE/GNVQ A*-C grade or above in academic year:

	1996/97	*1997/98*	*1998/99*	*1999/00*	*2000/01*
Pupils in:					
Specialist pre 1 September 1997	52	54	57	59	60
Specialist post 1 September 1997	45	47	48	49	51
Maintained mainsteam	43	45	46	48	49

Note:
1. Pupil weighted average.

TEC Surpluses

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* her estimate of the aggregate of Training and Enterprise Council surpluses attributable to public funds is, *(b)* the amount paid over to public funds to date in respect of those surpluses is and *(c)* action her Department is taking to recover outstanding amounts in respect of each TEC. [74106]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) on 24 July, *Official Report*, column 1359W–60W.

Sector Skills Council

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to create a sector skills council for post-compulsory education. [74637]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Employers are discussing with my Department the potential for a UK-wide Sector Skills Council for post-compulsory education. These discussions are at an early stage. A firm proposal from employers would also need the support of the devolved administrations. It is the responsibility of the Sector Skills Development Agency to assess proposals against the Sector Skills Council standard and to recommend the award of licences.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the sector skills councils *(a)* established prior to April, *(b)* established subsequently and *(c)* currently in formation. [74635]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We announced the award of trailblazer Sector Skills Council status to five sectors in December 2001. These sectors represent the audio visual; environment and land-based; oil and gas extraction, chemicals manufacturing and petroleum; apparel, footwear and textiles and retail industries. No further Sector Skills Councils have been licensed. There are five sectors in the final phase of developing Sector Skills Council proposals for consideration by the Sector Skills Development Agency. These sectors represent the e-skills; hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism; technology, engineering and science; construction and process manufacturing industries.

National Training Organisations

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many national training organisations are in place. [74636]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Government recognition of National Training Organisations was withdrawn in March 2002. 61 organisations formerly with this status continue to operate in their own right.

Schools Access Initiative Fund

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department has taken to inform schools of the Schools Access Initiative Fund. [74139]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Information on the Schools Access Initiative is available on the Department's Special Educational Needs website at www.dfes.gov.uk/sen including information about allocations to individual Local Education Authorities and advice on how to find out more. Guidance on capital issues, including Schools Access Initiative, is also available on the education resource website teachernet at www.teachernet.gov.uk

We sent guidance to all schools—*Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils*—in July this year. This included information on the Schools Access Initiative.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps her Department is taking to monitor the applications and spending decisions made under the Schools Access Initiative Fund, with particular reference to differing types of disability. [74140]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in receipt of resources provided under the Schools Access Initiative, are required to submit an implementation report to the Department at the end of the financial year confirming the types of access work and schools which have been targeted, together with costs and potential benefits of the work. This information is not categorised according to type of disability.

LEAs are under a statutory duty to plan to increase the accessibility of their schools to disabled pupils, and the effective provision of access for disabled pupils in schools is an integral factor in the appraisal of Asset Management Plans. OfSTED will also monitor schools' accessibility plans as part of their inspections.

Digital Photographs

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if digital photographs of children are being used to identify them in schools. [73317]

Mr. Miliband: Schools have for many years taken photographs of pupils for sale to parents, copies of which have been kept in the school. In recent years, copies of these photographs have been made available on a CD to many schools, so that a photo can be added to a pupil's electronic record.

A photograph of a pupil falls within the definition of data in section 1 of the Data Protection Act and schools should ensure that the storage and use of the photograph is compatible with the Act.

Juvenile Obesity

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research is being commissioned by the Department on levels of obesity amongst school children; and what assessment has been made as to how these vary in different types of school. [73348]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: This Department has not commissioned any research into obesity amongst school children, or carried out any assessment as to how obesity varies in different types of school.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the report by the Better Regulation Task Force regarding education. [73764]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Better Regulation Task Force published their report "Higher Education: Easing the Burden" on 22 July. Due to the Summer Recess, the Task Force has agreed that the normal 60-day response time can be extended to end of October. I will inform the hon. Member of the Government's response at that time.

Apprenticeships

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many apprentices *(a)* started and *(b)* completed their apprenticeships in the years commencing 1 May (i) 1996, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 2002. [74329]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The number of Advanced Modern Apprenticeships (AMA) and Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMA) started by young people (aged 15 to 24) are as follows:

	FMA	*AMA*
(i) 29 April 1996–4 May 1997	0	56,900
(ii) 5 May 1997–4 May 1998	1,400	68,300
(iii) 29 April 2002–23 June 2002	4,400	12,000

Note:

Figures exclude transfers between AMA, FMA and other work-based learning.

(b) Information on completion of AMA and FMA frameworks is not available.

Children in Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to raise the educational standard of children in care. [73928]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Student Finance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will publish her review of student finance. [74688]

Margaret Hodge: I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

HEALTH

Health Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)* 2 May 1997 and *(b)* 31 May 2002. [60893]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the right hon. Member to the central answer provided by my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, col. 1402W. Copies of the documents are available in the Library.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors in the Huntingdon constituency. [74238]

Mr. Lammy: Information on the numbers of vacancies for nurses and doctors in the Huntingdon constituency has been placed in the Library.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the planned cost is of administrative and support staff for the North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire NHS Health Authority in 2002-03. [74328]

Jacqui Smith: The planned cost of administrative and support staff for the North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire Strategic Health Authority is £4 million.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the Nursing and Midwifery Council's proposals to introduce compulsory insurance. [74330]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has received 32 letters from independent midwives and those who have used their services on this subject.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of administrative and support staff in NHS organisations within the North Yorkshire Health Authority area in 1996–97; and what the planned cost is of administrative and support staff for *(a)* Hambleton and Richmondshire Primary Care Trust, *(b)* Craven, Harrogate and Rural District PCT, *(c)* Selby and York Primary Care Trust, *(d)* Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale PCT, *(e)* Harrogate Health Care Trust, *(f)* South Tees Hospital NHS Trust and *(g)* York Health Services NHS Trust in 2002–03. [74327]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table below.

NHS Organisation	*1996/97 (£m)*
North Yorkshire Health Authority	5.9
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust	3.164
Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	3.481
York Health Services NHS Trust	5.273

NHS Organisation	*2002/03 (£m)*
Hambleton and Richmondshire Primary Care Trust	1.890
Craven, Harrogate and Rural District Primary Care Trust	1.980
Selby and York Primary Care Trust	4.320
Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale Primary Care Trust	2.225
Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust	3.558
South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust	6.6
York Health Services NHS Trust	5.0

MS Drug Therapies

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what system of audit was set up alongside the risk sharing scheme for MS drug therapies announced in February; [73308]

(2) what information *(a)* PCTs and *(b)* strategic health authorities are required to provide to his Department in respect of the risk sharing scheme for MS drug therapies; [73309]

(3) What assessment he has made of the success of the risk sharing scheme for the MS drug therapies since its inception; [73310]

(4) if he will undertake an interim review to assess progress in implementing the risk sharing scheme for drug therapies for MS; and if he will make a statement. [73357]

Mr. Lammy: The risk-sharing scheme is subject to the usual arrangements for clinical governance and audit adopted within the National Health Service. It is the role of the strategic health authority to ensure that policy is delivered appropriately in its area. Each neurology centre submits data to the scheme co-ordinator, Sheffield University's School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR).

Primary care trusts and strategic health authorities are not expected to report routinely to the Department, though we have, in this instance, requested reports on progress. We understand that, in most areas if treatment is not already being initiated, it will start over the autumn.

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Standing Committee on zootechnics is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70565]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Standing Committee on Zootechnics meets infrequently and we have no information about when the next meeting will be. UK representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting, and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations where there are items of sufficient interest.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the EU Standing Veterinary Committee is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if he will make a statement. [70564]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (formerly the Standing Veterinary Committee) generally meets twice a month to discuss public health or animal health matters. The next meeting is due to take place on 8/9 October 2002. UK veterinary representation varies according to the agenda for each meeting, and may include members of the Scottish Executive and other devolved administrations where there are items of sufficient interest.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in making beta interferon available for MS sufferers by *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* hospital trusts serving (i) West Somerset and (ii) Taunton Deane. [73269]

Ms Blears: Beta interferon and glatiramer acetate are available on the National Health Service for the treatment of people with multiple sclerosis (MS) under the "risk-sharing scheme". The scheme, which came into operation on 6 May 2002, allows such treatments to be prescribed on the NHS to patients who meet the criteria set out by the Association of British Neurologists. All pharmaceutical companies involved have agreed terms for the supply of their products under the scheme. Patients will be monitored to confirm whether the drugs are working and costs to the NHS will reduce if patients do not benefit as expected.

Currently, approximately 51 patients from Somerset are receiving treatment. The local primary care trusts are in discussion to arrange funding for an MS nurse beyond the period provided for by the pharmaceutical industry.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what appeal procedures are in place to enable MS patients who have been denied a place on the beta interferon pilot to challenge that decision; [73511]

(2) what audit procedures are in place to ensure that local implementation takes place of the risk-sharing scheme involving drug therapies for beta interferon that he announced earlier this year; [73515]

(3) how many patients were receiving treatment with drug therapies for beta interferon in Essex on 5 May; and how many patients are now being treated with these therapies; [73513]

(4) what controls he intends to use to prevent consultants who do not agree with the wider use of beta interferon from preventing their qualifying MS patients from entering the pilot; [73512]

(5) what assessment his Department has made of progress in implementing the risk-sharing scheme in relation to beta interferon; and if he will make a statement; [73514]

(6) what progress is being made in making beta interferon available for MS sufferers by *(a)* primary care trusts and *(b)* hospital trusts serving patients in Essex. [73510]

Mr. Lammy: If a clinician has decided that a patient should not receive treatment under the risk-sharing scheme, and that patient is dissatisfied with the decision, we expect the patient would be offered a second opinion from another clinician.

The risk-sharing scheme is subject to the usual arrangements for clinical governance and audit adopted within the National Health Service. It is the role of the strategic health authority to ensure that policy is delivered appropriately in its area. Each neurology centre submits data to the scheme co-ordinator, Sheffield University's School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR).

Primary care trusts and strategic health authorities are not expected to report routinely to the Department, though we have, in this instance, requested reports on progress. We understand that, in most areas if treatment is not already being initiated, it will start over the autumn.

We understand that 139 Essex patients were being treated prior to the inception of the scheme and that 19 patients have been initiated on treatment since May.

Frozen Embryo Bank

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms are in place for the management and independent inspection of the Frozen Embryo bank; and how many mismatches have been *(a)* claimed and *(b)* verified in the last year. [74761]

Ms Blears: Frozen embryos are stored in centres licensed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). Storage must be in accordance with the conditions of the licence, which include compliance with the HFEA's code of practice. The code of practice is regularly reviewed and laid before Parliament. The HFEA carries out a full inspection of each centre before a licence is given and every three years thereafter. In the interval there are annual inspections of specific aspects of the centre's work. A case involving alleged irregularities in frozen embryo storage is currently subject to court proceedings.

Blood Products

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide funding to allow all NHS patients to access virus-inactivated plasma; and if he will make a statement. [74060]

Ms Blears: Plasma used for the production of blood products is virus inactivated and is already sourced from United States donors as a precaution against the theoretical risk of vCJD.

An announcement was made on 15 August 2002 that fresh frozen plasma (FFP) will be obtained from the United States for new born babies and children born after 1 January 1996. This measure is designed to protect the most vulnerable group who will not have been exposed to BSE through foodstuffs. The United States FFP will be subject to treatment with methylene blue to reduce the risk of transmission of blood borne viruses.

The Government expert advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissue for transplantation is continuing to keep this issue under review and there are currently no plans to allocate further funding.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the Government did not decide in 1998 to stop the use in transfusions of fresh frozen plasma derived from UK donors; and if he will make a statement. [74061]

Ms Blears: The Government expert advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues for transplantation did consider the importation of fresh frozen plasma (FFP) in 1998. The National Blood Service advised that sustainable supplies of imported plasma for FFP could not be obtained for the large number of patients every year who required it.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will apply the obligatory safety monitoring and other patient safeguards which are standard for licensed pharmaceutical products to fresh frozen plasma and methylene blue-treated fresh frozen plasma. [74204]

Ms Blears: The Medicines Control Agency already ensures that the United Kingdom's blood services meet European good manufacturing practice standards. In addition, the new European Blood Directive will, when adopted, require the accreditation of all blood establishments to ensure common standards of safety and quality in blood and blood components across all Members States and the reporting of serious adverse reactions attributable to the safety and quality of blood and blood components.

The UK serious hazards of transfusion (SHOT) reporting system has had safety monitoring of fresh frozen plasma (FFP) and methylene blue treated FFP in place for five years. Although SHOT is a voluntary scheme the level of reporting compares favourably with reporting of suspected adverse drug reactions associated with licensed pharmaceuticals. Ninety two per cent. of hospitals in the UK already participate in SHOT and recent guidance to the National Health Service on the appropriate use of blood asks all hospitals to ensure participation www.doh.gov.uk/publications/coinh.html. SHOT publishes an annual report, and a copy of the most recent, for 2000–2001, has been placed in the Library.

The National Blood Service is developing a new patient information leaflet for all patients who will undergo a transfusion with blood or blood components.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce his decision regarding the funding for the provision of non-UK plasma; and if he will make a statement. [74205]

Ms Blears: Plasma used for the production of blood products is already sourced from United States donors as a precaution against the theoretical risk of vCJD.

An announcement was made on 15 August 2002 that fresh frozen plasma (FFP) will be obtained from the United States for new born babies and children born after 1 January 1996. This measure is designed to protect the most vulnerable group who will not have been exposed to BSE through foodstuffs.

The Government expert advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissue for transplantation is continuing to keep this issue under review.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place to prevent the transmissions of West Nile Fever in blood purchased from the United States for use in the UK. [74756]

Ms Blears: Plasma is currently imported from the United States for the production of plasma products, as a precaution against the theoretical risk of vCJD transmission. Viral inactivation of these products is carried out as a safety measure to remove the risk to patients of transfusion transmittable viruses, including West Nile fever virus, should it be present. The decision to import plasma for babies and young children born after 1 January 1996 from the United States was recently announced. This plasma will also undergo viral inactivation.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason methylene blue-treated fresh frozen plasma is being advocated for use in children and others by the National Blood Service; and what assessment he has made of its safety. [73932]

Ms Blears: As an added precaution against the theoretical risk of vCJD transmission, the Government's expert advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues for transplantation (MSBT) has recommended importing single unit fresh frozen plasma (FFP) from the United States. On 15 August 2002 the Government announced that imported FFP would be used for new-born babies and young children born after 1 January 1996.

On the advice of MSBT, US sourced FFP will be virally inactivated using methylene blue (MB) treatment. MB has been administered in medical practice since 1900, and in much larger doses, many thousand-fold, than the National Blood Service (NBS) will be using. NBS will be removing more than 90 per cent. of MB before the FFP is issued to National Health Service hospitals. MB is a registered medical device under the Medical Devices Directive and has a European safety (CE) marking.

Oxygen

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make available at reasonable cost ambulatory and/or liquid oxygen to those with respiratory difficulties likely to benefit. [74640]

Mr. Lammy: I have no plans at present to change the arrangements under which oxygen is provided for patients who need it. The current review of the domiciliary oxygen service has not yet been concluded.

Asthma Nebulisers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make more asthma nebulisers available on prescription. [74639]

Mr. Lammy: We consider that asthma nebulisers are best provided to patients on loan from specialist National Health Services services. We have no current plans to make them available on general practitioner prescription.

Hospital Chaplains

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the discussions between his officials and the Multi-faith joint First National Working Group in relation to advice and information for hospital chaplains. [73750]

Mr. Lammy: Department officials have been working closely for some time with the multi-faith joint national working group via their chosen representative, the Chief Executive of the hospital chaplaincies council to produce renewed advice on the provision of chaplaincy services in the National Health Service.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the findings of the Patient Information Advisory Group with regard to the work of hospital chaplains. [73754]

Mr. Lammy: The patient information advisory group has advised me that National Health Service trusts should seek consent from patients before information about their religious affiliations can be passed to hospital chaplains. The NHS will need to develop systems for supporting the work of chaplains whilst recording and respecting the preferences of patients. I have placed a copy of the advisory group's advice in the Library.

Care Homes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimates his Department has made of the total cost to social services departments of the recent decision by the Competition Commission Appeal Tribunal on social services department funding of care home placements; [74789]

(2) what advice he will issue to social services departments in England on abiding by the recent Competition Commission Appeal Tribunal decision on social services department funding of care home placements; and if he will make a statement. [74790]

Jacqui Smith: The judgement by the competition commission appeal tribunal, in the case of Bettercare versus the Director General of Fair Trading, found that purchasing by a public body, in certain circumstances, is an economic activity carried out by an undertaking and therefore may be subject to the provisions of the Competition Act 1998. The judgement reflected a particular set of circumstances and is not of general application. In broad terms, the Competition Act is concerned with anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant market positions. We would not expect councils to be acting in ways that are inconsistent with the Competition Act. The Government's White Paper *Modernising Social Services* made clear that councils should apply best value principles when securing social care services, whether those services are directly provided or purchased from a private or voluntary sector organisation.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential care home places for elderly people were closed in the Huntingdon constituency during the last 12 months. [74221]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not centrally available.

Children's Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the recent report into the preparation of the Social Services Inspectorate report on children's services in the London Borough of Haringey. [74435]

Jacqui Smith: The Social Services Inspectorate did not prepare a report into the preparation of the inspection of children's services in the London Borough of Haringey. The most recent published report is that of the Inspection of Children's Services February 2002, which was published on 1 July 2002.

Looked-after Children

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the GCSE exam performance of looked-after children in 2002. [74436]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not currently available. Data on the educational qualifications of care leavers aged 16 or more in year ending 31 March 2002 will be published by the Department in November 2002.

Social Services Inspectorate

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to the Social Services Inspectorate concerning the role of inspected social services departments assisting service users and carers in completing questionnaires distributed as part of a Social Services Inspectorate inspection. [74434]

Jacqui Smith: No guidance has been given to the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) on this topic. SSI is committed to obtaining the views of service users as part of its assessment of social services functions. SSI has advised inspected authorities that they should offer independent help to users and carers when they are completing questionnaires as part of an inspection, particularly for those people who may have difficulties completing a questionnaire.

Information Systems

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the steps his Department has taken and plans to take to identify and remove incompatibility between NHS and social service information systems. [74427]

Mr. Lammy: The national strategic implementation programme for delivering 21 Century information technology support for the National Health Service, published by the Department in June 2002, sets out the actions required to meet the targets of the NHS Plan. A key element in this programme is the development of the integrated care records service (ICRS), which seeks to address the problems caused by the incompatibility of health and social service systems.

Over the last two years, the Department has also commissioned a number of projects that have sought to identify and provide practical solutions to the problems of integrating health and social care systems. Two of the projects within the electronic records development and implementation programme (ERDIP), supported by the NHS information authority, have developed joint records for use by all members of community mental

health teams, including both health and social services staff. Also, within the *Information for Social Care* demonstrator programme, a number of the projects have addressed issues relating to the sharing and exchange of information between health and social care agencies.

These issues are also being progressed through the information strategies which support the national service frameworks, particularly those relating to mental health, older people and children's services.

Hepatitis C

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation he has made of the measures *(a)* available and *(b)* required to prevent, treat and manage cases of chronic hepatitis C infection. [73896]

Ms Blears: We published *Hepatitis C Strategy for England* for consultation on 14 August 2002 in recognition of the importance of hepatitis C as an important public health issue, as highlighted in the Chief Medical Officer's infectious disease strategy, *Getting Ahead of the Curve*. The strategy sets out the current situation and proposals to improve the effectiveness of prevention, diagnosis and treatment services for hepatitis C.

Following consultation, it is intended that the strategy will form the basis of an action plan, as proposed in *Getting Ahead of the Curve*. This will serve as a clear framework setting out actions that need to be taken by Government, the National Health Service and others to intensify efforts to tackle hepatitis C.

Folic Acid

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responsibility the Food Standards Agency has with respect to informing Government policy on the fortification of flour with folic acid. [73894]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency was asked to consider and provide advice on the practical risk management issues which were linked to options for achieving universal fortification of flour with folic acid.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the effects of fortifying flour with folic acid on *(a)* the occurrence of birth defects and *(b)* the incidence of cardiovascular disease in other countries; [73895]

(2) if he will ask the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition to review evidence on the effects of folic acid in lowering homocysteine and reducing cardiovascular disease. [73893]

Ms Blears: The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA, 2000), assessed the effects of folic acid on birth defects, such as neural tube defects (NTD), and estimated that fortification of flour with folic acid at a level of 240 micrograms per 100g could reduce the incidence of NTD affected pregnancies by 43 per cent. In terms of other countries, mandatory fortification has been implemented in the US, Canada and Chile. Recent research in some US States has linked the policy with a fall in the incidence of NTD. However, the level of fortification in other countries varies considerably from that recommended by COMA and therefore the results may not be directly comparable.

There is epidemiological evidence that increasing dietary folate may reduce blood levels of homocysteine, an independent risk factor for cardiovascular disease (CVD). However, the effect of increasing folate intake on the incidence of CVD is not as yet conclusive. Results of ongoing randomised controlled trials are awaited.

I have no plans at present to refer the matter of links between folic acid, homocysteine levels, and cardiovascular disease to the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. However, it is open to the Committee to review the developing evidence in this area if it feels this is appropriate.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will make a decision on his policy on the fortification of flour with folic acid. [73892]

Ms Blears: The decision on this complex issue requires careful consideration of both the benefits and the possible risks of fortification. The options are currently being considered, in the light of the recommendations of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA, 2000); responses to the consultation process, carried out in 2000; and advice from the Food Standards Agency.

Prescriptions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average amount paid to Her Majesty's Government from the prescription charge was for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [73714]

Mr. Lammy: Data for 2000–01 indicate that on average each person who was liable to pay prescription charges, excluding those who held a pre-payment certificate, paid for around three prescription items.

Prescription charges collected in England for each of the last ten years are shown in the table.

Year	*Prescription Charge*	*Total Collected (including PPC sales) £m*
1991–92	3.40	215.2
1992–93	3.75	242.0
1993–94	4.25	265.3
1994–95	4.75	287.2
1995–96	5.25	298.7
1996–97	5.50	295.7
1997–98	5.65	320.9
1998–99	5.80	341.3
1999–00	5.90	366.7
2000–01	6.00	386.9

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what clinical benefits are expected from the electronic transfer of prescriptions programme; [73326]

(2) what the projected lifetime cost is of implementing the electronic transfer of prescriptions programme. [73323]

Mr. Lammy: The electronic transmission of prescriptions between general practitioner practices and community pharmacists is just one element of a wider programme to modernise pharmacy services and the issue of prescriptions. The aim is to implement a new national prescriptions service that supports improved information on individuals' past and current medication, the move from paper based prescriptions with handwriting to secure electronic prescriptions with digital or graphical text and better decision support with integrated access to online drug dictionaries. There will be many building blocks that make up the whole national prescriptions service and at an infrastructure level the electronic transfer of prescriptions and prescription messaging together with connections and computers for pharmacists will be essential.

The benefits of a national prescriptions service are then considerable. They will include:

safer prescribing to save lives and reduce harm by automatic checks on drug interactions and dosage, and less errors arising from illegible or incomplete prescriptions

a more convenient service for patients with easier and faster repeat prescriptions and choice over where they would like to collect their prescriptions

better medicines management and the dramatic reduction of fraud and loss of money that can be put into patient care.

A business case is being prepared for the national prescriptions service and its key components. This will identify, and provide more detail for, the full range of patient, clinical and efficiency benefits to be realised. The outline business case should be completed by January 2003.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the prescription charging system. [74198]

Mr. Lammy: We have no current plans to review the prescription charging arrangements.

Mercury

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies his Department has commissioned on the impact of mercury in vaccines and its effect upon children; and if he will make a statement. [73787]

Ms Blears: The Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) has recently reviewed the currently available data relating to possible neurotoxicity of thiomersal (a mercury-containing compound) in vaccines and advised that there is no evidence of harm caused by doses of thiomersal in vaccines, except for sensitisation reactions. The CSM concluded that the risk: benefit balance of thiomersal-containing vaccines remains overwhelmingly positive.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) in the United States also published a detailed review of the evidence relating to possible neurotoxicity of thiomersal in vaccines in October 2001. The IOM review also concluded that the evidence did not support a causal association between thiomersal contained in vaccines and neurodevelopmental disorders. These findings were consistent with the CSM conclusions.

We are aware of two studies in the United Kingdom looking at the relationship between mercury in vaccines and neurodevelopmental disorders in children. One of these studies is funded by the Department and uses the Avon longitudinal study of pregnancy and childhood. The other study is using the general practice research database and is funded jointly by WHO and PHLS, which receives its funding from the Department. Neither of these studies supports an association between thiomersal exposure through the UK programme and neurodevelopmental disorders in children. The results of these studies have been made available to the Department and a summary of the findings is available in a Report to The US Congress which will be placed in the Library.

Vaccines

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the four projects that are directly related to generating and testing new vaccine candidates and make a statement on the Government's involvement in each. [73732]

Ms Blears: Both the national institute for biological standards and control and public health laboratory service receive funding from government, some of which is spent on research and may be related to new vaccine work. They also receive funding/grants from other external sources, which includes help with research and development on vaccine activity.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the contracts to manufacture vaccines awarded to Powderject by his Department over the past two years, stating in each case what vaccines were to be supplied, when the order was placed, what the value of each contract was, where each vaccine was to be manufactured and whether the order was put out to a full competitive tender. [74235]

Mr. Hutton: In the past two years, the following contracts have been awarded to Powderject:

Vaccine	*Date contract awarded*	*Site of manufacture*
BCG & PPD	10 March 2001	UK
Influenza	6 August 2001	UK
Smallpox	11 April 2002	Germany

All were put out to normal competitive tender except for smallpox, which was not subject to the normal competitive tendering process on the grounds of protection of the basic interests of the security of the UK.

We do not disclose the value and quantity of the contracts, as this is commercially confidential.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which company was awarded the contract to produce anti-tuberculosis vaccines for his Department last March; how much the value of that contract came to; and whether the cost represented a significant increase on previous contracts to manufacture similar vaccines. [74234]

Ms Blears: PowderJect were awarded a two-year contract for the supply of BCG vaccine in March 2001. Information surrounding the value of individual contracts is commercially confidential and is not disclosed.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what preparations his Department has made with respect to purchasing further doses of smallpox vaccine, subsequent to the contract awarded to Powderject. [74233]

Mr. Hutton: Our longer term requirements for licensed Lister strain smallpox vaccine are currently under consideration

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role Impfstoffwerke Dessau Tornau is to play in the manufacture of the smallpox vaccine which will be supplied to the Government by Powderject. [74232]

Mr. Hutton: Impfstoffwerke Dessau Tornau GmbH (IDT) is the subcontracting manufacturer of the new smallpox vaccine for Bavarian Nordic, with whom PowderJect have an exclusive agreement for the supply of smallpox vaccine.

Growth Hormone Deficiency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Pituitary Foundation, *(b)* the Royal College of Physicians and *(c)* the Society for Endocrinology on the subject of growth hormone deficiency. [73352]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no discussions with the Pituitary Foundation, The Royal College of Physicians or the Society for Endocrinology on the subject of growth hormone deficiency.

In May the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommended to the National Health Service in England and Wales that human growth hormone (somatropin) is both a clinically and cost effective way to treat children with growth hormone (GH) deficiency. A decision on adult growth hormone deficiency is eexpected from NICE shortly.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the average cost of treatment for individuals suffering from growth hormone deficiency in the last year for which figures are available. [73353]

Jacqui Smith: The cost of treatment depends on the dose, which is determined by the weight and size of the patient, as well as the individual growth hormone reserve. The average annual cost of growth hormone treatment, based on March 2002 figures, is around £3350 per patient.

Correspondence

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to answer the correspondence from the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, referred to him by the Prime Minister, concerning Dr. Chai Patel and his membership of advisory committees; and if he will list those committees. [74342]

Mr. Milburn: I replied on 7 October 2002.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of 10 January from the hon. Member for New Forest West. [54356]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 1 July 2002.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne of 19 April, 16 May, 14 June and 11 July relating to correspondence from Mr. Hugh McKinney of Cert. [70435]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 16 July 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 30 July 2002.

Epilepsy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will set a national target for reduction of epilepsy deaths; [74052]

(2) whether the Home Office is being consulted on the Action Plan to address the findings in the National Audit of Epilepsy-Related Death on the adequacy of post-mortem investigations; [74050]

(3) what plans he has to address the information and support needs for bereaved families affected by SUDEP and other epilepsy deaths; [74048]

(4) what plans he has to address the findings in the epilepsy deaths report on the adequacy of post-mortem investigations. [74049]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) on Thursday 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, col. 344W.

We are working with the Royal College of Pathologists to promote their guidelines on autopsy practice, to improve post mortem investigations. The guidelines cover neuropathological cases, including deaths in epilepsy. Additionally we propose to consider ways of improving practice in new death certification and investigation procedures in the light of the Home Office review of coroners system which is due to report in April 2003.

GPs

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners *(a)* took early retirement and *(b)* left for other reasons from primary care practice in Sunderland in each year since 1998. [74259]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table:

	1998	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002**
Early retirement	2	2	4	1	2
Left for other reasons	13	7	18	15	8

Notes:
Early retirement is defined as under 60 years
* 2002 to end of August
Source:
Northumberland and Tyne & Wear Strategic Health Authority

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* female and *(b)* male GPs took up their first post in the NHS since 1998; what available number of GP training places there were in each year since 1998; what special measures were taken locally to

recruit GPs since 1998; broken down by each health authority/PCT in the Northern and Yorkshire areas; and if he will make a statement. [74256]

Mr. Hutton: Data are not collected in the format requested.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies for general practitioners there were in the Taunton constituency in each year since 1996; and if he will make a statement. [74089]

Ms Blears: The Department first carried out a survey into general practitioner (GP) recruitment, retention and vacancies in 2000. The information is collated on a health authority basis.

In the 2000 survey Somerset Health Authority reported that it had four GP vacancies outstanding at some time in the 12 month period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000. In the 2001 survey there were 28 general practitioner (GP) vacancies at some time in the 12 months from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001.

Results from the 2002 survey should be available later in the year.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds have been blocked in Somerset hospitals in each month in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [74112]

Ms Blears: Information on delayed transfers of care has been collected at health authority level and has been placed in the Library. Figures are available for the four Quarters of calendar year 2001 and the first Quarter of 2002.

Nursing

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing posts there are at the *(a)* Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust and *(b)* South Somerset NHS Trust which have been vacant for three months or more. [74111]

Ms Blears: The three month vacancy rate[1,2] for qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in Taunton & Somerset Hospital National Health Service Trust is 0.3 per cent. This is based on less than five vacancies[3] and staff in post of 980 whole time equivalents and 1,260 headcount.

There is no data available for South Somerset Primary Care Trust. This was a new primary care trust in April 2002 after the three month vacancy survey was undertaken.

Source: Department of Health Vacancy Survey 2002

Department of Health Non medical workforce census September 2001

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2002 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which have lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalent)

2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from this survey.

3. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest ten.

4. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

5. Due to rounding calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rate.

6. Staff in post data is from the non-medical workforce census September 2001.

7. Figures exclude learners.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the Nursing and Midwifery Council concerning their processing of registration applications from non-EU qualified nurses with special reference to the efficient process of applications for registration; and if he will make a statement. [74081]

Mr. Hutton: I met with Mr. Jonathan Asbridge, President of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), in July to receive a progress report from him regarding the implementation of the new Nursing and Midwifery Order. The well-publicised problems of the NMC regarding delays in the processing of applications for registrations formed part of those discussions and I am, through my officials, continuing to monitor the progress of the NMC in addressing these issues.

I support the continuing actions taken by the President to resolve the immediate issues and his commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of the systems and processes that the organisation inherited from its predecessor, the United Kingdom central council for nurses, midwives and health visitors (UKCC).

I am advised that the NMC has cleared the backlogs in the UK applications and is continuing to target resources at registration applications from those qualified overseas, from both within and outside the European Union.

Anaphylactic Attacks

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice his Department has given to pharmacies to have epipens available to treat anaphylactic attacks; [73900]

(2) what requirements there are for pharmacies to have epipens available to treat anaphylactic attacks. [73899]

Mr. Lammy: The Department has not given any advice to pharmacies that requires them to have eipipens available to treat anaphylactic shock. As epipens are prescribable items we would expect pharmacies to stock them as a matter of course.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain in their code of ethics refers to emergencies and states "Pharmacists must assist persons in need of emergency first aid or medical treatment whether by administering first aid within their competence or by summoning assistance and or the emergency services".

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department has given to *(a)* nursery and *(b)* primary schools about special measures for children susceptible to (i) anaphylactic shocks and (ii) other allergies. [73897]

Mr. Lammy: In 1996 the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment issued joint guidance on *Supporting pupils with medical needs in*

schools. The guidance, which was sent to health authorities and local education authorities, covers treatment and the development of healthcare plans for pupils suffering from potentially life threatening medical conditions, including anaphylaxis. Although aimed primarily at schools the guidance was also recommended to special schools, nursery schools and further education colleges.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability in *(a)* schools, *(b)* chemists, *(c)* restaurants and *(d)* doctor's surgeries of epipens to treat anaphylactic shocks. [73898]

Mr. Lammy: In 1996 the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment issued joint guidance on *Supporting pupils with medical needs in schools*. The guidance, which was sent to health authorities and local education authorities, covers treatment and the development of healthcare plans for pupils suffering from potentially life threatening medical conditions, including anaphylaxis. Although aimed primarily at schools the guidance was also recommended to special schools, nursery schools and further education colleges.

The Department has not assessed pharmacies regarding the availability of epipens. As epipens are prescribable items we would expect pharmacies to stock them as a matter of course. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain in their code of ethics refers to emergencies and states "Pharmacists must assist persons in need of emergency first aid or medical treatment whether by administering first aid within their competence or by summoning assistance and or the emergency services".

There has been no assessment of the availability of epipens in restaurants and doctors' surgeries.

Food Poisoning

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of food poisoning were contracted during a hospital stay in each of the last five years, broken down by trust. [74202]

Mr. Lammy: Data on food poisoning cases contracted during a hospital stay are not available. The table shows reported outbreaks of food borne infectious intestinal disease in England from 1997 to 2001 by strategic health authority.

Year	*Number of outbreaks*	*Strategic Health Authority*	*Number of people ill**
1997	1	Kent	38
1997	1	London	2
1997	1	Northumberland	36
1997	1	Somerset	14
1997 (total)	*4*		*90*
1998	1	Thames Valley	10
1998	1	Norfolk	27
1998	1	Surrey	100
1998 (total)	*3*		*137*
1999	1	Hampshire	7
1999	1	North Yorkshire	35
1999	1	Hampshire	50
1999 (total)	*3*		*92*
2000	1	Essex	6
2000	1	South West Peninsula	106
2000	1	Essex	8
2000 (total)	*3*		*120*
2001 (total)	*0*		*0*
1997 to 2001 (total)	*13*		*537*

Note:
* includes patients and staff
Data source:
PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre—GSURV Gastrointestinal Diseases Division

Restenosis

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of whether percutaneous coronary interventions with bare stents increased after the National Institute for Clinical Excellence completed its appraisal of stents in May 2000; [74216]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the cost of readmitting patients who have restenosis after revascularisation; [74218]

(3) if his Department has set targets for the reduction of restenosis following stenting in revascularisation. [74217]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect cost or activity data that relates solely to hospital readmission and has not made any assessment about the cost of readmitting patients who have restenosis after revascularisation.

The Department does not collect information on the number of percutaneous coronary interventions that involve the use of stents.

The Department has not set any targets for reduction in restenosis following stenting in revascularisation.

NICE

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps are being taken to ensure that health economic data used by NICE is accurate, reliable and up-to-date; and if he will make a statement; [74209]

(2) what assessment he has made of the reliability and accuracy of health economic data used by NICE in its appraisals; what mechanisms exist to review the reliability and accuracy of the data; and if he will make a statement. [74210]

Mr. Lammy: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence's (NICE) appeals committee obtains health economics data from two main sources—a technology assessment report (TAR) prepared for each appraisal and submissions from manufacturers.

The academic teams which prepare TARs were selected through a competitive tendering process which provides assurance of their competence to carry out this

work. Before presenting the TAR to NICE, the team seeks the comments of expert reviewers and technical staff at NICE. The TAR is subsequently scrutinised by the NICE appraisal committee and by consultees to the appraisal.

Submissions from sponsors of technologies (including manufacturing) are critically examined by the academic teams which produce TARs, by the technical staff at NICE and by the appraisal committee.

There is therefore a comprehensive process in place for quality assuring the evidence used in NICE appraisals.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received on the credibility and clarity of NICE guidance; and if he will make a statement. [74211]

Mr. Lammy: We have received correspondence about many appraisals in which the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has recommended restricted use of a technology.

The Health Select Committee, on which the hon. Member serves, has published its conclusions on the credibility and clarity of NICE guidance. The Government response was published in September 2002 as Command Paper 5611.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given NICE in respect of his policy of enhancing patient choice in the context of NICE appraisals of modes of dialysis. [74240]

Mr. Lammy: None. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence carries out its appraisals independently of Ministers.

Blood Products

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make the reporting of adverse incidents associated with transfusions in the NHS mandatory. [74058]

Ms Blears: The serious hazards of transfusion (SHOT) reports provide a comprehensive picture of serious transfusion complications in the UK. The fifth annual SHOT report (published April 2002) showed an increase in participation to 92 per cent. of eligible hospitals. Participation in the scheme has been encouraged by guidance to the National Health Service, most recently in HSC 2002/009—("Better Blood Transfusion—Appropriate use of blood") http://www.doh.gov.uk/bbt2/009hsc2002). This asks Chief Executives of National Health Service trusts to ensure participation in the SHOT scheme by December 2002.

SHOT is currently collaborating with the new National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) whose core function is to improve the safety of NHS patient care by promoting a culture of reporting and learning from adverse incidents and professional errors without fear of personal reprimand. The NPSA reporting system will be implemented across the NHS from 2003 and will cover of all types adverse incidents and "near misses" affecting NHS patients, including those associated with transfusions.

The draft European Commission Directive on standards of quality and safety of human blood and blood components requires Member States to report "any serious adverse events (accidents and errors) related to the collection, testing, processing, storage and distribution of blood and blood components which may have an influence on their quality and safety, as well as any serious adverse reactions observed during or after transfusion which may be attributed to the quality and the safety of blood and blood components".

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to reduce the mortality and morbidity levels associated with fresh frozen plasma. [74059]

Ms Blears: The Government's advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissue for transplantation is continuing to consider the relative efficacy and risks of the different types of fresh frozen plasma (FFP) available.

United Kingdom FFP is already a very safe product. To minimise the risk from viruses, it is made only from previously tested blood donors. Since the year 2000, an additional test for hepatitis C has been added. As a result the risk from a unit of FFP is estimated to be one in five million for HIV and lower than one in one million for hepatitis C. Over 300,000 units of FFP are issued annually and it is only given in life-threatening situations to prevent or stop haemorrhage associated with abnormal blood clotting.

The National Blood Service is conducting an option appraisal of means to minimise the risk of transfusion-related acute lung injury from FFP.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what representations he has received in favour of the use of solvent detergent-treated transfusion plasma produced from United States of America plasma; and if he will make a statement. [74057]

Ms Blears: The Government has received correspondence from Octapharma Ltd supporting the increased use of their product "Octaplas". Department officials have also met Octapharma and further discussions are planned.

"Octaplas" is licensed in the United Kingdom and can be purchased by National Health Service trusts. It is made by pooling plasma from donors but is treated with solvent detergent to reduce the increased risk of viruses caused by pooling. There would also appear to be a reduced risk of transfusion-related acute lung injury (TRALI) with this product. We understand that it is not yet made exclusively from United States plasma but soon will be.

United Kingdom sourced fresh frozen plasma (FFP) is also available from the National Blood Service and is more commonly used by the NHS than Octaplas. It is made from single donations from donors who have been previously tested for viruses to minimise the risk of infection. Like all blood for transfusion, FFP is also leucodepleted to reduce the theoretical risk from vCJD.

As an added precaution against the theoretical risk of vCJD, the Government announced on 15 August that FFP for young children and babies will be imported from the United States. This FFP will be treated with methylene blue to reduce the risk of viral transmission

still further for this most vulnerable group. This decision was made following advice from the advisory committee on microbiological safety of blood and tissues for transplantation (MSBT) who are continuing to review the safety of FFP.

Blood Transfusions

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS trusts are required to transfuse anaemic cancer patients at the haemoglobin levels recommended by the British Committee for Standards in Haematology, following the publication of the Health Service Circular 2002/009, Better Blood Transfusion; Appropriate Use of Blood. [73958]

Ms Blears: The Department published Health Service Circular 2002/009, *Better Blood Transfusion—Appropriate Use of Blood* on 4 July 2002, available on www.doh.gov.uk/publications/coinh.html. This circular recommends that National Health Service trusts adopt national guidelines for the appropriate use of blood and recommends a number of national guidelines and web sites, including guidelines from the British committee for standards in haematology published in 2001. These guidelines provide specific advice to clinicians. The type of treatment offered to anaemic cancer patients is a matter of individual clinical judgement and discussion with the patient concerned.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS trusts are required to give patients information on *(a)* the alternatives to transfusion and *(b)* the standards of transfusion in advance of receiving treatment following the publication of the Health Service Circular 2002/009, *Better Blood Transfusion—Appropriate Use of Blood.* [73959]

Ms Blears: The Department published Health Service Circular 2002/009, *Better Blood Transfusion—Appropriate Use of Blood*, on 4 July 2002, available on www.doh.gov.uk/publications/coinh.html. This circular asks National Health Service trusts and primary care trusts to ensure that written information is made available to patients on transfusion and the alternatives by April 2003.

National Blood Authority

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much state subsidy the National Blood Authority has received over the past three years; if he will publish its full consolidated accounts in the future; and if he will make a statement. [74206]

Ms Blears: The table shows the central funding which the Government has provided to the National Blood Authority (NBA) between 1999–2000 and 2001–2002.

	Revenue (£ million)	*Capital (£ million)*
1999/2000	17.127	18.715
2000/2001	17.257	11.500
2001/2002	46.550	16.149

The published annual reports of the NBA contain financial statements in summary form. Each report states that a full set of Accounts can be provided by NBA on request.

A full set of NBA Accounts for 2000–01 have been placed in the Library.

Care Homes

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 121W, if he will make it his policy to collect this data. [73817]

Jacqui Smith: There are currently no plans to publish information on nursing and care home beds more frequently than annually. Information relating to the change in the number of homes between 2001 and 2002 will be available later this year. The National Care Standards Commission is developing its database to enable the production of information linked to its Royal Commission requirements. Within this context, information relating to the quality and capacity of residential and nursing care home beds will be available later this year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 459W, on care homes, if he will place copies in the Library of the letters sent to national providers about the increases in fees experienced by residents. [56594]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* No, as the correspondence relates to the commercial or contractual activities of care homes.

NHS Clinical Governance Support Programmes

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total running cost has been of the NHS Clinical Governance Support programmes. [73344]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is shown in the table.

Programme	*Cost 2001/2002 £000s*
Clinical Governance Development Programme	578
Strategic Leadership of Board Development Programme	235
Protected Time Pilot Programme	324[1]
General Practitioner Appraisal Training Programme	67
Total	1,204

Note:
[1] plus £50,000 for each of the 19 NHS pilot sites to support them in the local delivery of the programme

Transplants

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he plans to publish his consultation paper on organ transplantation; [74237]

(2) what assessment he has made of the progress towards the United Kingdom's transplants target of 2,500 transplants per annum by 2005–06. [74236]

Mr. Lammy: At the first ever organ donation and transplantation summit in February 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched a draft plan—*Organ and Tissue Transplantation—a plan for the future*. The plan issued for consultation included draft proposals aimed at increasing kidney donation rates to achieve 2500 renal transplants in England by 2005–6. We are considering the comments received. A final version of the plan is being developed and will be published in due course. UK transplant continually monitors transplant activity and the latest figures are available from their website (www.uktransplant.org.uk).

Clinical Governance

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* background and *(b)* intentions of the strategic leadership of the Clinical Governance Board programme led by the NHS Governance Support Team. [73350]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS Plan for investment and reform identifies the need to put in place a robust management and support framework to deliver national standards of care. The strategic leadership of clinical governance board development programme was introduced in February 2001 to ensure top-level board commitment to deliver these national standards.

Currently the board development team is working with 100 National Health Service organisations to enable them to deliver safe, high quality healthcare. They enable boards strategically to factor in external drivers and future changes to create a clinically focused strategy and development plan that make a difference to the lives of patients and health professionals.

Blood Donors

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of blood donors who will be removed from the blood donor base if recipients of blood are banned from donating blood. [73931]

Ms Blears: The National Blood Service estimates that approximately 13$,000, or 7.7 per cent., to 255,000, or 14.5 per cent. of blood donors would be removed from the donor base if it was decided to exclude donors who had previously received a blood transfusion, as a precautionary measure to minimise the theoretical risk of transmitting vCJD through blood. The Government's expert advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues for transplantation is currently considering this along with other possible vCJD risk reduction measures.

Neo-Natal Services

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason there has been a delay in publishing the report on the future of neo-natal services in England; and when it will be published. [73935]

Jacqui Smith: The report on the future of neonatal services in England was delayed so as to allow for the implications of its recommendations to be more fully assessed. It is anticipated that the report will now be published for consultation later this year.

Surgical Instruments

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS hospitals have received delivery of new surgical instrument decontamination equipment as a result of the commitment of the £200 million at the start of 2001; [73979]

(2) what progress has been made with regard to spending the money announced at the start of 2001 to upgrade hospital decontamination facilities. [73977]

Mr. Lammy: At the end of August, £85 million had been allocated to 101 schemes proposed by National Health Service trusts for improving their decontamination facilities. These schemes included purchasing new equipment, upgrading the buildings used for reprocessing and purchasing new surgical instruments to facilitate the centralisation of reprocessing. This, together with contributions from the NHS trusts themselves, amounted to an investment of some £107 million. Similar bids worth another £10 million were still being considered.

In order to get the best value for money, the tendering process for equipment has been undertaken by the NHS purchasing and supply agency. Individual contracts are awarded by the NHS trusts themselves, taking into account local issues such as the expected completion of essential building work. The installation of equipment will follow these necessary preparations.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the procurement rounds organised by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency for new surgical instrument decontamination equipment since the commitment of £200 million at the start of 2001. [73978]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS purchasing and supply agency tendered for all the sterilizers and washer-disinfector requirements that were identified as part of the immediate investment process to upgrade existing decontamination facilities within the National Health Service in England.

This major investment covers in excess of 70 NHS trusts across the country for 115 sterilizers, 171 washer-disinfectors and a large amount of associated equipment and accessories to the approximate value of £28 million.

A number of suitable sites have recently been identified for intermediate investment and the NHS purchasing and supply agency is in the process of procuring this additional equipment.

A significant proportion of the £200 million is being spent on building work to improve segregation and the purchase of surgical instruments to enable centralisation of the service.

PFI Funding

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals in England have had PFI funding in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [73726]

Mr. Hutton: In the year from April 2000, 24 contracts, with a value of £1 million or greater, were signed. In the year from April 2001, 11 contracts with a value of £1 million or greater, were signed.

No records are kept centrally of schemes valued at less than £1 million.

Hospitals (Alcohol and Tobacco Consumption)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the rules are governing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco *(a)* on hospital premises, *(b)* in patient areas and *(c)* in emergency services staff areas. [74160]

Ms Blears: There are no centrally imposed rules on alcohol consumption on National Health Service premises, but all NHS trusts are expected to have policies in place that reflect their need to provide patients with high quality medical care in a safe environment. The Department issued Guidance entitled *Taking alcohol and other drugs out of the NHS workplace* in February 2001, which deals with the issue of alcohol consumption by NHS staff, but does not ban it from NHS premises.

Many NHS trusts have already banned smoking in their hospitals and hospital grounds and the Government have set milestones for implementing smoking policies across the NHS as part of the national service framework on coronary heart disease.

Reserve Forces Doctors

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the operating cost was of the compulsory mobilisation of reserve forces doctors employed by the NHS on 16 May. [73930]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the operating cost are not held centrally.

Elective Surgery Abroad

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the pilot scheme to refer NHS patients overseas for elective surgery. [73780]

Mr. Hutton: The pilot scheme for treating National Health Services patients in other countries in the European Economic Area was evaluated by the York Health Economics Consortium. Their evaluation has been published and is available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/international and the Library.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 July, ref 68035, what quality checks are in place for elective operations performed abroad under contract to the NHS. [73781]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has established lead commissioning arrangements for overseas healthcare capacity. Guy's and St. Thomas' National Health Service Trust is responsible for finding high quality elective treatment capacity and providers of clinical teams to come to this country in Austria, Belgium, Germany, and northern Europe. Kent and Medway Health Authority is responsible for finding treatment capacity and providers of clinical teams in France, Spain and more southerly countries.

The Department has advised NHS primary care trusts and NHS trusts to approach one of the two NHS lead commissioners if they wish to arrange for treatment for patients abroad.

In selecting hospitals in other countries in the European Economic Area to treat NHS patients the lead commissioners take into account relevant paper evidence and visit hospitals where patients may potentially be treated. Quality requirements are set out in the contracts agreed between the lead commissioners and the hospitals abroad. The Department has asked the lead commissioners to ensure that contracts with overseas healthcare providers will require them to afford reasonable access to the Commission for Health Improvement and other appropriate bodies.

Obesity

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total amount of Government funding has been for research and development into issues related to overweight people and obesity in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [74458]

Ms Blears: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in health and social care.

The MRC has a large commitment to nutrition generally with major investments in the MRC Dunn human nutrition unit, the MRC resource centre for human nutrition research and the MRC international nutrition group. Spend on the whole portfolio amounted to £16.6 million in 2001–02, for example.

The total MRC and Department expenditure specifically on obesity related research for the past five years is as follows:

Year	*£million*
1997/1998	£0.3
1998/1999	£0.5
1999/2000	£1.0
2000/2001	£2.0
2001/2002	£2.1

In addition, the Department provides National Health Service (NHS) support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that takes place in the NHS. Details of ongoing and recently completed research projects funded by, or of interest to, the NHS are available on the national research register at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

NHS Financial Directors

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many financial directors were employed in the National Health Service in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1997 and are now employed in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) the UK. [73567]

Mr. Lammy: In 1979 it was not compulsory for every National Health Service body in England to appoint a Finance Director. Records are not held centrally of how many were in post at that time.

Since 1979 each NHS body in England has been required to appoint a Finance Director. The number of such bodies was 543 in March 1997 and 596 in March 2002.

The position in other countries within the United Kingdom is the responsibility of the devolved administrations.

Child Psychotherapists

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the availability of funding for child and adolescent psychotherapists in South West Hampshire; [73938]

(2) how many child and adolescent psychotherapists are practising in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; and what funding is being made available for training posts. [73939]

Ms Blears: A total of 5.7 whole time equivalent (wte) child psychotherapists are employed across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

The Department allocates the multi-professional education and training levy to local workforce development confederations (WDCs) for the training of health professionals, including child psychotherapists.

The Hampshire and Isle of Wight WDC is responsible for deciding priorities for investment in new training places and is aware of a bid for a child psychotherapy trainee in Southampton. The WDC has not been able to fund all the bids it received this year for additional training places in the many different health professions but bids will be reconsidered against next year's allocation.

Patient Records

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place to enable a person to access patients' records made before 1 November 2001. [73906]

Mr. Lammy: The Data Protection Act 1998, which came into force in March 2000, enables individuals to apply for access to their health records, regardless of when their records were created. The Access to Health Records Act 1990, which came in to force in November 1991 governs rights of access to the health records of deceased persons.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many requests to access patient records were made in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 under the Data Protection Act 1998. [73907]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested in not held centrally.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations have been received by the Information Commissioner on access to patients' records being refused in each year since 1990. [73905]

Mr. Lammy: I have been informed by the Office of the Information Commissioner that it holds general information about the number of enquiries and complaints it has received regarding health matters under the Data Protection Act 1998 since it came in to force on 1 March 2000, but it does not hold details of the specific issues involved in each case. Prior to this date the majority of requests for access to health records were governed by the Access to Health Records Act 1990, but no information is held centrally on numbers of requests or refusals.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms his Department has put in place to remove the variations between trusts in the standard of structure and content of patient records. [73909]

Mr. Lammy: The delivery of electronic records is being taken forward in implementing the national strategic programme *Delivering 21st Century IT—Support for the NHS* which was announced by my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (the Lord Hunt of Kingsheath) following the publication of *Delivering the NHS Plan* on 11 June 2002. One of the key aspects of phase one of the programme requires all primary care trusts and National Health Service trusts and hospitals to implement elements of electronic patient records by December 2005.

To support the NHS toward delivering this vision the Department in July 2002 published for consultation the *National Specification for the Integrated Care Records Service* to take forward the life-long heath record service. The key feature of the programme is the shift to a more corporate, national approach to deliver information technology in the NHS. This represents a step-change from the current arrangements whereby systems are typically provided for individual organisations in each health care sector. For electronic records this change means that there will be a national approach to procurement resulting in services conforming to national standards, which will include record structure and some content standards. The resulting services will be able to inter-operate with emerging national services such as the electronic staff record and the health record infrastructure. The aim being to ensure that all electronic record systems are fully compliant with national standards and specifications by December 2007.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many requests were made to access health records for deceased persons in each year since the Access to Health Records Act 1990 came into force. [73908]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is not held centrally.

Booked Admissions Programme

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the projected lifetime cost is of implementing the booked admissions programme. [73324]

Mr. Hutton: The national booking programme began as 24 pilots in 1998 and since September 2001 is being implemented in every health community in England in order to move booking to a mainstream way of providing National Health Service services. By

December 2005 all inpatients and outpatients will benefit from the choice of a convenient date, time, place and provider for their hospital appointments and admissions.

Booked appointments are one element of the reforms set out in the NHS Plan to provide health services designed around the patient. The lifetime costs of the booking programme are not separately identifiable from the overall costs of improving patient services. The table below shows funding made available to the national booking programme since 1998.

National Booking Programme Funding since 1998 (£ million)

1998–99	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
10	20	40	50	60

NHS Information Technology

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the NHS IT programme, *Delivering 21 Century IT Support*, to reach the OGC gate three investment decision. [73325]

Ms Blears: The Gateway Review 3: Investment Decision is designed to ensure that the recommended investment decision is appropriate before a contract is placed. It provides assurance on the processes used to select a supplier, whether the process has been well managed and whether the business needs are being met. It also provides assurance that the proposed solution can be implemented and managed to achieve a successful outcome.

The national Information Technology programme as a coherent whole, and each major component thereof, will be subject to a Gateway Review 3 at the appropriate time. Some major elements e.g. electronic appointment booking may reach Gateway Review 3 earlier than others but this stage should be completed for all components by Spring 2003.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the NHS IT programme has passed its Gate Zero Gateway Review by the Office of Government Commerce. [73332]

Ms Blears: The national programme for Information Technology in the National Health Service, *Delivering 21st Century IT Support for the NHS* successfully completed the Gateway Review 0: Strategic Assessment in July 2002. The gateway review process is not an audit and the key stages of the review process are not in the strict sense, pass or fail.

The Office of Government Commerce team review and make constructive recommendations to the senior responsible officer, in this case Sir John Pattison. We are acting on their recommendations to ensure the programme management, monitoring and resourcing is appropriate and are now working towards Gateway Review 1.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what formal assessment he has made of the relationship between size and risk in the successful procurement and delivery of NHS IT projects; and if he will publish such assessments and its supporting evidence. [73333]

Ms Blears: The initial work on developing a national strategic programme and implementation plan for Information Technology in the National Health Service did consider an outline risk analysis. A major component of the risk management strategy will be through the rigorous application of the Office of Government Commerce gateway review. The programme team will also have risk management as one of its core functions.

The Department is also guided by advice from the Office of Government Commerce in developing formal business cases for key components of the national programme when necessary as part of the procurement process. This would include individualised risk assessments. At the appropriate time the risk analysis and management assessments will be made available.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether the e-Envoy's office will be involved in managing implementation of the NHS IT programme, *Delivering 21 Century IT Support*; [73328]

(2) whether the e-Envoy's office will be involved in managing implementation of the NHS IT programme identified by the OGC as necessary following its Gate Zero Gateway Review. [73329]

Ms Blears: The office of the e-Envoy has been consulted on the initial development of the national programme for Information Technology in the National Health Service and the implementation plan. Andrew Pinder, the e-Envoy, will be a key part of the ministerial taskforce on IT. The taskforce is to be chaired by my noble Friend, The Parliamentary Under-Secretary, The Minister for IT in the NHS and will monitor the feasibility and progress of the programme and evaluate the way it is being managed.

There was no recommendation on the specific future role of the e-Envoy's office from the gateway review process. The office of the e-Envoy will continue to provide technical advice and help co-ordinate the programme with wider eGovernment initiatives as we proceed through the Office of Government Commerce gateway review.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department had with potential preferred service providers before the Government announcement on NHS IT policy; and if he will list the potential preferred service providers with which such discussions were held. [73337]

Ms Blears: The Department routinely receives many approaches from suppliers of healthcare information technology (IT), services and information communication technology. The policy for some time has been to promote partnership working across the IT supplier community and this has involved two way dialogue on the aims and objectives of the Department and ideas based on the experience of a whole range of small and major IT suppliers.

One of the supporting workstreams in the new national programme for IT in the National Health Service is entitled "Developing IT Industry capacity for the NHS". A number of meetings with NHS IT suppliers have been held to introduce the proposed

procurement strategy. There was also a one day forum on 22 July that was attended by approximately 200 NHS IT suppliers.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total expected cost of implementing the NHS IT programme, Delivering 21 Century IT support is, for each year between 2003 to 2009, in terms of *(a)* current baseline spending and *(b)* additional investment. [73327]

Ms Blears: *Delivering the NHS Plan* in April 2002 promised a greater share of new investment for information and communication technology. The increased levels of funding from April 2003 to March 2006 are part of the Spending Review 2002 and no details have been made available yet.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the consequences for existing NHS IT suppliers of the preferred service provider model for NHS IT procurement; and if he will publish it; [73334]

(2) what advice he has received on the preferred services provider model for NHS IT procurement; and if he will make a statement. [74285]

Ms Blears: We published the summary of the overall procurement strategy for the national programme on 26 July 2002. Its purpose was to provide information on the preferred model, approach and contracting arrangements and enable consultation with a wide audience across the NHS and National Health Service IT supplier community. Almost 90 responses were received and the feedback and comments are being reviewed. A synopsis of the main feedback will be published in early October and work continues on developing the full procurement strategy. The full version of the procurement strategy will be available by December 2002.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to NHS trusts and PCTs relating to potential planning blight in the purchasing and installation of IT systems following the Government announcement on NHS IT policy on 12 June. [73335]

Ms Blears: Key messages have been given that the National Health Service should be working to achieve the following:

Connecting all NHS staff to the NHS network for email communications and web browsing

Enabling the electronic transfer of pathology requests and results between GPs and NHS laboratories

Improving the information and IT support to the clinical priorities covered by the national service frameworks.

All NHS trusts are also expected by December 2005 to have implemented the first generation of electronic records that will provide a common set of applications and functionally across the NHS. Wherever current procurements are in hand our clear message has been to proceed. The Interoperability of systems will be critical to delivering national services and specifications and standards for NHS IT systems. They are still in development, indeed will continue to develop over time but we have made it clear that compatibility with key standards that are known is an essential requirement for current procurements.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether his Department has agreed with the Office of Government Commerce an action plan to implement corrective actions to the NHS IT programme identified by the OGC as necessary following its Gate Zero Gateway Review; [73330].

(2) what action plan his Department has to implement corrective actions identified by the Office of Government Commerce as necessary following its Gate Zero Gateway Review; and if he will place a copy of the plan in the Library; [73336]

(3) how many corrective actions to the NHS IT programme were identified by the Office of Government Commerce as necessary following its Gate Zero Gateway Review; and if he will list them. [73331]

Ms Blears: New and large-scale procurement projects in central Government are subject to gateway reviews. The process examines a project at critical stages to provide assurance that it can progress successfully to the next stage. The review provides project teams with advice and guidance from fellow practitioners and in order to maintain the integrity of the advice, this is held to be completely confidential by both parties. The gateway review process is not an audit.

No action plan with the Office of Government Commerce is routinely produced as a part of the gateway review process and none has been agreed in this case. However they do make recommendations to the senior responsible officer, in this case Sir John Pattison, on good practice in key areas such as programme management and involving key stakeholders. The national programme is taking their key recommendations on board as appropriate to help prepare for implementation and the next stage in the gateway review.

Value for Money

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the data underlying his Department's value for money scores in relation to the 1998 public service agreements; and if he will make a statement. [74770]

Mr. Lammy: The published measure for the 1998 public service agreement's targets on the efficiency and value for money of Departmental operations was that business plan objectives would be achieved within the running costs limits set by the Comprehensive Spending Review. Running cost plans and outturn against them where available have been published in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) for the years 1999–2000 to 2002–03, copies of which are available in the Library. The statistics demonstrate that the Department is on track to meet the targets.

Northwich Park Hospital

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further action he is taking to improve the quality of, and reduce waiting times in, accident and emergency services at Northwich Park Hospital. [74501]

Mr. Hutton: Improving patients' experience of emergency care is essential. In light of this, reforming emergency care was launched in October 2001 supported by £118 million investment. It sets a long-term programme of reform supported by extra investment and new capacity to address one of the public's key concerns about the National Health Service—waiting in Accident & Emergency.

Concerted action is being taken to further improve the quality of and waiting times in Northwick Park A&E. The A&E department is now receiving targeted support through the Modernisation Agency's intensive support team (IST).

Action already taken to improve the way emergency admissions are managed, including an increase in capacity of 21 beds has already drastically reduced very long waits for beds over the last six months. In addition NUCare, which is an innovative joint scheme run by the trust and local primary care trust, is speeding up care for patients with less serious illness or injuries by bringing GPs and community services into A&E.

Over seven out of ten patients now spend less than four hours in total in the A&E. There is still a long way to go and no room for complacency but the combination of local action by the trust and its health community with the support of the IST is laying the ground work for real improvements to the patient experience.

Medical Research

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* funding and *(b)* progress with medical research into fluoridation and (i) cancer rates and (ii) hip fractures. [74249]

Ms Blears: The report, published on 4 September, of an expert working group set up by the Medical Research Council (MRC) at the request of the Department concluded that there was no firm evidence linking water fluoridation to cancer or to hip fractures. But the group recommended that a comparison be made between the amount of fluoride that the body absorbs from water supplies in which it occurs naturally and those to which it has been added artificially.

We are, therefore, taking immediate steps to commission a project on the absorption of fluoride. The Department is finalising the specification for a research project to compare the body's absorption of naturally occurring and artificially added fluoride, and will shortly be inviting tenders. The MRC group concluded that if new studies show that the uptake of fluoride from artificially fluoridated water is substantially higher than from naturally fluoridated water, then further investigation of the long term effects of fluoridation on hip fractures will be needed.

The group also recommended that an updated analysis be made of the data on fluoridation and cancer rates, and suggested that any new studies on the causes of bone cancer could easily include an assessment of exposure to fluoride. The Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Dental Officer will be advising on the action we should take on this and the remaining recommendations in the MRC group's report.

GM Foods

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU legislation is in force regarding GM foods. [73857]

Ms Blears: The following United Kingdom legislation regarding genetically modified foods is in force:

The Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients Regulations 1997, as amended.

The Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients (Fees) Regulations 1997, as amended.

The Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1994, as amended.

The Genetically Modified and Novel Foods (Labelling) (England) Regulations 2000.

The Genetically Modified and Novel Foods (Labelling) (Scotland) Regulations 2000.

The Genetically Modified and Novel Foods (Labelling) (Wales) Regulations 2000.

The Genetically Modified and Novel Foods (Labelling) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.

The following European Union legislation regarding genetically modified foods is in force:

Regulation (EC) 258/97 concerning novel foods and novel foods ingredients.

Regulation (EC) 1139/98 concerning the compulsory indication of the labelling of certain foodstuffs produced from genetically modified organisms of particulars other than those provided for in Directive 79/112/EEC.

Regulation (EC) 49/2000 amending Council Regulation (EC) 1139/98.

Regulation (EC) 50/2000 on the labelling of foodstuffs and food ingredients containing additives and flavourings that have been genetically modified or have been produced from genetically modified organisms.

Drug-resistant Bacterium

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to reduce the proliferation of drug-resistant bacterium. [73844]

Mr. Lammy: We are committed to tackling the serious problem of antimicrobial resistance. In 2000, we published the UK Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy and Action Plan which identified three key areas for tackling antimicrobial resistance; surveillance of antimicrobial resistant organisms and use of antimicrobials, promoting prudent antimicrobial use and infection control to contain and prevent the spread of antimicrobial resistant organisms.

More recently, the Chief Medical Officer's infectious disease strategy, published in January 2002, has identified antimicrobial resistance as a priority area for intensified action and a targeted action plan is being developed to build on the existing UK strategy. The new targeted action plan will take into account the views from a range of stakeholders including priorities identified by the recently constituted specialist advisory committee on antimicrobial resistance.

Asthma

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide financial assistance to people who cannot afford asthma medication. [73660]

Mr. Lammy: People with asthma are entitled to free National Health Service prescriptions if they are under 16 (or under 19 if in full-time education); aged 60 or over; hold a maternity or medical exemption certificate; receive income support or income based jobseekers allowance, are named on a tax credit NHS exemption certificate; or hold an NHS low income scheme exemption certificate for full help.

Patients who need frequent prescriptions may benefit from purchasing a prescription prepayment certificate.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been diagnosed with asthma in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [73658]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally. However tables showing the number of hospital episodes by age where the primary diagnosis is asthma have been placed in the Library. The International Classification of Disease 10 codes J45–J46 have been used. The data is for 1996–97 to 2000–01.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has gone into research into the causes of asthma; and how much has been allocated to financing drug treatment in each of the last five years. [73659]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the cause and treatments of disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. Asthma is a priority area for the MRC. It supports a wide range of research projects looking at asthma ranging from basic research to applied clinical studies. The MRC spend in the area in 2000–01 was approximately £3 million.

The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the National Health Service. The Department of Health also provides NHS support funding for research commissioned by the research councils and charities that takes place in the NHS. The Department spend on directly commissioned research projects on asthma since 1997 is an estimated £7.24 million.

Health authorities (HAs) and primary care trusts (PCTs) receive funding to spend each financial year but the Department does not specify how much of that should be spent on the drugs bill, nor how much should be spent on individual drugs such as for asthma. However, guidance is set and sent out to all HAs and PCTs advising what monies should be set aside for prescribing budgets, what level of growth should be assumed, and what factors should influence their budget setting process.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assistance the Government have given to the National Asthma Campaign in raising awareness of the effects of asthma. [73657]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has recently provided the National Asthma Campaign (NAC) with a section 64 grant to assist the funding of a telephone help-line. This enabled the NAC to both help asthma sufferers and their families as well as raising awareness of the condition.

The Department is currently arranging a series of discussions between the NAC, the British Thoracic Society and the British Lung Foundation with various sections of the Department and the Modernisation Agency to help shape initiatives in progress within the Department.

Bereavement Counselling

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what bereavement counselling is available to parents who have lost a child. [74399]

Jacqui Smith: A range of services for people suffering bereavement reactions is available within the National Health Service. The Department has also sought to strengthen more specialised services, in partnership with voluntary organisations like the Child Bereavement Trust, which receives funding through the Department's Section 64 grant aid scheme.

Brain Injury

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* information, *(b)* support and *(c)* services are available to (i) people with brain injury, (ii) their families and (iii) carers. [74422]

Jacqui Smith: Patients with brain injury, their families and carers are able to access the full range of National Health Service services for head injured people. The information, support and services an individual receives will depend on the extent and severity of the brain injury they have incurred.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently developing guidelines for patients and clinicians on early management of head injury. The guidelines are scheduled for publication around March 2003. These guidelines, together with the forthcoming national service framework for long term conditions, will help ensure that health and social care services work together to provide the right level of treatment and care for people with brain injury.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions the Department has had with charities and the voluntary sector to provide and improve the quality of support, activities and facilities for people with brain injury. [74423]

Jacqui Smith: I am meeting hon. Members and the Chief Executive of Headway on October 22. Officials have had discussions with both Headway and United Kingdom Acquired Brain Injury Forum recently and will meet the Chief Executive of Rehab UK on 16 October to discuss the key issues which they consider should be addressed in the long term conditions national service framework which will have a particular focus on treatment and care for people with brain injury. Those discussions will cover the quality of support, activities and facilities for people with brain injury.

Headway and Rehab UK are currently receiving Section 64 funding for projects that will help patients with brain injury.

Children's Deaths

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he issues to ensure that *(a)* parents are

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given a full explanation and *(b)* care and consideration is taken when death of a child occurs during surgery. [74400]

Jacqui Smith: Parents should be supported after the death of their child and given information that will help them understand why the death occurred. Health Service Guidelines HSG(92)8, issued on 23 January 1992, deals with patients who die in hospital, whether child or adult.

The guidance requires hospitals to ensure that all staff who deal with the dying or the deceased and their relatives are made aware of the document. It also requires those commissioning healthcare services to ensure that hospitals have appropriate procedures in place to ensure that account is taken of the guidance.

The children's national service framework will look further at the special considerations surrounding the death of a child and include examples of good practice.

Oxtail

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of meat hygiene regulations on the availability in British shops of oxtail from beasts reared in the UK. [74703]

Ms Blears: I am not aware that the availability of oxtail has been affected by any recent change to meat hygiene regulations.

Devon and Cornwall Health Authorities

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what amount each of the health authorities in Devon and Cornwall was overspent at the point at which they ceased to be operational. [69185]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 July 2002]:* The previous health authorities in Devon and Cornwall ceased to exist on the 31 March 2002. In their statutory annual accounts for their last year of operation covering the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 they reported the following:

Health Authority		
North and East Devon	£144,000	Underspend
South and West Devon	£168,000	Underspend
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly		Breakeven

The accounts of these organisations have now been audited by their external auditor and signed off as representing a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the health authorities as at the 31 March 2002.

However, in respect of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly a disclosure note was incorporated into the annual accounts, which identified that the Cornwall Health Community had an underlying deficit and that the health authority achieved financial balance through the receipt of non-recurrent brokerage of £6.3 million.

Wynthenshawe Hospital

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason Wynthenshawe Hospital failed to reschedule heart surgery on Mr. Stanley Ford of Warrington within 28 days of the first cancellation of his operation; [71381]

(2) for what reason Wythenshawe Hospital cancelled heart surgery on Mr. Stanley Ford of Warrington six times; and, in each case, what the reasons were for the cancellations; [71379]

(3) what the average time taken in 2001 by the Chief Executive of Wythenshawe Hospital was to reply to letters from hon. Members outside Manchester. [71377]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 19 July 2002]:* The reasons for the six cancellations were as follows: on 22 March, there was unforeseen sickness amongst theatre staff and priority was given to an emergency admission; on 13 May, non-availability of a clinician who was needed to perform a specialist procedure; on 29 May, no intensive care bed available; on 31 May, 12 and 14 June, all elective surgery was cancelled owing to an methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infection.

Surgery could not be rescheduled within 28 days for clinical reasons of which the patient and his family are aware.

The trust received 23 letters in 2001 from hon. Members whose constituencies are outside Manchester. The average response time was ten working days.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will discuss with the Chief Executive of Wythenshawe Hospital the hospital's methods of handling complaints made by hon. Members on behalf of their constituents; and if he will make a statement; [71378]

(2) if he will investigate for what reason the Chief Executive of Wythenshawe Hospital has not replied to correspondence from the hon. Member for Warrington, North about the case of Mr. Stanley Ford; and if he will make a statement. [71380]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 19 July 2002]:* We have taken this matter up with the Chief Executive and I understand a letter has now been sent.

Long-term Sickness

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to improve services to get those who have chronic diseases but are of working age back to work. [74503]

Jacqui Smith: Helping people back to work after an accident or illness is a priority for the Government. The Department works closely with the Department for Work and Pensions and organisations representing disabled people to review and develop policy in this area.

We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions and the Health and Safety Executive on job retention and rehabilitation pilots to test different health and employment strategies to help people with long term sickness or disability to remain in their jobs. They will start in April 2003 and run for two years. Job retention advisers will act early to assist those who have been forced to give up work through prolonged illness or disability to retain their skills and links with employers.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many families there are in bed and breakfast accommodation in the last three years for which figures are avilable, broken down by local authority. [74203]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Showing Available information reported by local authorities in England on the total number of households—including couples and single persons without children—accommodated in bed and breakfast units under statutory homelessness provisions at the end of March in each year since 1999 is avaiblable in the Library.

National and regional figures are presented in a quarterly Statistical Release, and an accompanying Supplementary Table also summarises reported information at local authority level. Both of these are also available in the House library and via the ODPM website.

Earlier this year the Government announced a new commitment to ensure that by March 2004 no family with children will be placed in B&B other than in an emergency, and even then for no more than 6 weeks. This was accompanied by changes in Housing Benefit subsidies to make leasing self-contained temporary accommodation more cost effective, and an additional £35 million to help local authorities find alternatives to B&B.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what provision he will make to fire authorities spending above their SSAs when he revises the SSA formula for fire; and if he will make a statement. [73940]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: Statutory responsibility for the provision of fire services rests locally with the fire authority.

We invited comments on options for changes to the formulae for the distribution of revenue support grant for local authority services, including fire, in a consultation period which ran from 8 July to 30 September. Our proposals will be announced in the provisional local government finance settlement later this year.

The total provision for revenue funding for fire and other local authority services is considered in the spending reviews. Under Spending Review 2002, announced in July, the fire service share of Total Standard Spending in England will be increased by £61.6 million (4 per cent.) for 2003–04 and by increases of £70 million (4.4 per cent.) and £50 million (2.9 per cent.) in the following two years.

Fire Service

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures are in place to ensure that the Fire Service has adequate resources and equipment. [73389]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: Statutory responsibility for the provision of fire services rests locally with the fire authority. However, a fire authority may not reduce its establishment without the approval of the Secretary of State under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. Consent is only given when he is satisfied that the national standards of fire cover will be maintained. Fire authorities are inspected regularly by HM Fire Services Inspectorate as to the manner in which they are performing their functions.

Under Spending Review 2002 the fire service share of Total Standard Spending in England will be increased by £61.6 million (4 per cent.) for 2003–04 and by increases of £70 million (4.4 per cent.) and £50 million (2. per cent.) in the following two years.

There have also been substantial increases in fire service capital provision for England and Wales, with an increase of 67 per cent. in 2001–02. A further increase of 3.4 per cent. is planned for 2003–04 and this level of credits will be maintained for 2004–05 and 2005–06. An additional £200 million in PFI credit approvals has already been earmarked for the fire service, and a further £50 million in PFI credits will be made available to the service in both 2004–05 and 2005–06.

£43 million will be provided under the Capital Modernisation Fund for mass decontamination equipment, supported by an additional £13 million in revenue funding. We have said that we shall fully fund the new fire service radio replacement strategy. Amongst other funding initiatives, we are providing £15 million additional funding over three years from 2003–4 for community fire safety and arson reduction initiatives, targeting socially deprived areas.

Under the Central Local Partnership, we will continue to work closely with fire service stakeholders in England and Wales in the Fire Service Expenditure Forecasting Group to assess future funding pressures.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he plans to bring the firefighters working in the Retained and Volunteer Duty System up to the same standard of training and pay as their whole time counterparts; [73392]

(2) What the pay levels are of members of the Emergency Fire Control Staff; and what proposals he has to bring wages in line with firefighters of equivalent rank. [73391]

Mr. Nick Raynsford: As announced on 5 September, an independent review of the Fire Service is being conducted by Professor Sir George Bain. The review will look at the future organisation and management of the fire service in the United Kingdom, including retained and voluntary firefighters. In that context it will look at pay and conditions of service. It would not be appropriate, therefore, for me to pre-empt the outcome of the review.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the recent discussions with the Fire Brigades Union; and what conclusions have been reached. [73393]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: Following discussions with the Fire Brigades Union and other interested parties, on the 5 September my right hon. Friend the member for Greenwich & Woolwich announced an independent review of the Fire Service. The review will be conducted by Professor Sir George Bain, who has an outstanding

record in industrial relations and academia, including key roles at the London Business School, ACAS and the Low Pay Commission. He will be assisted by Sir Anthony Young, a past President of the TUC, and Sir Michael Lyons, who until recently was the Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council.

Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average length of time was between an application for rehousing under the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme and nomination to a property in the last 12 months. [74151]

Mr. Tony McNulty: 276 days.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the annual rate of reletting of council housing stock in each year since 1972. [74261]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Centrally available information collected from local authorities annually since 1979–80 is presented below.

Local Authority Stock Lettings to New and Existing Tenants: England

	Total Lettings	*as a % of stock*
1979–80	411,800	8.6
1980–81	444,000	9.2
1981–82	414,700	8.6
1982–83	438,800	9.0
1983–84	429,100	9.1
1984–85	429,300	9.3
1985–86	437,000	9.6
1986–87	430,200	9.6
1987–88	425,800	9.6
1988–89	410,200	9.5
1989–90	390,300	9.3
1990–91	400,900	9.9
1991–92	406,500	10.4
1992–93	399,900	10.4
1993–94	404,900	10.8
1994–95	407,900	11.1
1995–96	415,200	11.6
1996–97	422,000	12.2
1997–98	403,900	11.9
1998–99	378,900	11.4
1999–2000	354,000	11.1
2000–01	326,600	10.8

Note:
Lettings include mutual exchanges and transfers of existing tenants, and lettings made to new tenants on either secure or non-secure tenancies.
Source:
DOE/DTLR/ODPM Housing Investment Programme returns (annual)

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with local authorities about the Housing Mutual model to encourage housing transfer. [74515]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Ministers have had no discussions with English local authorities about the Housing Mutual model to encourage housing transfer.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the rate of change was in house prices in the past five years, broken down by region. [73964]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The rate of change in house prices in the past five years, by region, is estimated to have been as follows.

North East	+3.7%
North West	+54.8%
Yorkshire and The Humber	+49.6%
East Midlands	+72.4%
West Midlands	+65.4%
East	+92.6%
London	+110.0%
South East	+94.6%
South West	+97.0%
England	+82.7%
Wales	+56.1%
Scotland	+27.5%
Northern Ireland	+66.1%
United Kingdom	+77.1%

Sources:
ODPM Survey of Mortgage Lenders
Increase in the regional house price indices between Q2 1997 and Q2 2002.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent action has been taken to address the Housing shortages in *(a)* Glasgow and *(b)* the UK. [74419]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Following devolution, housing policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for the relevant devolved administrations.

Regional Planning Guidance requires planning bodies to strategically examine housing need, including the need for affordable housing, across their areas. We also expect local authorities to plan to meet their housing needs.

However, we recognise the need for more affordable homes in England, and have substantially increased resources to address this. Funding for the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) for next year will be £1.2 billion, almost double the figure for 2000–2001. This should deliver 22,700 homes next year.

My right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister will return to the House at the turn of the year with a comprehensive long-term programme of action to tackle supply and demand issues, as promised in his statement of 18 July, *Official Report*, Hansard, (col. 438).

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent action has been taken to ensure that *(a)* the right to buy is not abused and *(b)* people are able to have the option of buying their homes. [74421]

Mr. Tony McNulty: We are concerned about abuses of the Right to Buy scheme and we have commissioned research into their scope and extent. The results will be available by the end of this year. We are considering what can be done about such abuses, but we have no plans to end the Right to Buy scheme.

Under its devolved powers, the Scottish Parliament has passed legislation introducing a Modernised Right to Buy for new tenants in Scotland, to take effect from 30 September 2002.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent measures have been taken to improve the quality and conditions of social housing in *(a)* Glasgow and *(b)* the UK. [74420]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Responsibility for housing in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for the relevant devolved administrations.

For England we have set a Public Service Agreement target to bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010.

To help ensure delivery against this target we have set up a Delivery Unit to work with Government Offices and the Housing Corporation to ensure local authorities and housing associations quantify the level of non-decent housing in their stock and put in place a strategy for dealing with the problem, backed up by a very significant increase in resources since 1997.

The emphasis on delivery is paying dividends and we are on track to meet our interim target of bringing a third of the worst social housing up to a decent standard by 2004.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many applicants are on the waiting list for a nomination to a property under the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme. [74150]

Mr. Tony McNulty: On 30 September 2002 there were 564 applicants on the waiting list for a nomination to a property under the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research his Department has undertaken into the impact of relets of council housing of the introduction of the Right-to-Buy scheme. [74262]

Mr. Tony McNulty: We have commissioned research into the scope and extent of abuses of the Right to Buy scheme. The results will be available by the end of this year.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme on easing pressure on social housing in London; [74152]

(2) how many and what size of properties were released by nominees from London boroughs to the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme in each year since 1979, broken down by region. [74149]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The number of London Lettings released by the operation of the scheme in recent years are listed in the table below. This represents a useful contribution to easing pressure on social housing in London.

The number of households rehoused under the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme by property size are as follows. Figures prior to 1996–97 are not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. For 1999–00 (when the management of the Scheme was moved from North British Housing Association to HOMES) figures are not available by property size.

Local Authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Barking and Dagenham	2 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed	3 × 2 bed	4 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	4	1 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 3 bed
Barnet	1 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	1 × 1 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	0	2 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed	2 × 1 bed
Bexley	1 × 1 bed	1 × 1 bed	1 × 1 bed	0		
Brent	1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed		0	1 × 3 bed	1 × 2 bed
Bromley	2 × 1 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 3 bed 1 × 5+ bed	2 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	0	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	3 × 1 bed
Camden	2 × bedsit 4 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 4 bed	1 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	6 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed	7	3 × bedsit 6 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed	1 × 1 bed 2 × 1 bed 1 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed
City of London	1 × 1 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	1 × bedsit 1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1		1 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed
Croydon	1 × 1 bed	1 × bedsit 2 × 1 bed 2 × 3 bed	4 × 1 bed 3 × 3 bed	7	6 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	3 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed
Ealing	2 × 1 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	1 × 1 bed	4	1 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 4 bed
Enfield	5 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	1 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	5	1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed
Greenwich	1 × 3 bed 3 × 2 bed	5 × 1 bed 9 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed 3 × 4 bed	9 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	6	5 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed	3 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed

Local Authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Hackney	1 × bedsit 6 × 2 bed 6 × 3 bed	8 × 1 bed 5 × 2 bed 10 × 3 bed 1 × 5+ bed	3 × bedsit 3 × 1 bed 9 × 2 bed	13	1 × bedsit 2 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 6 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	1 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed
Hammersmith & Fulham	2 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	3 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	4 × 2 bed	1	2 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	1 × bedsit 1 × 2 bed
Haringey	1 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	2 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 5 × 3 bed	7 × 2 bed	13	2 × bedsit 1 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	2 × 1 bed 4 × 3 bed
Harrow	1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	2 × 1 bed	1 × 1 bed	0		1 × 1 bed
Havering	4 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	3 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	1 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed	4	3 × 1 bed 3 × 3 bed	
Hillingdon	1 × 3 bed	1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed		0	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	1 × 3 bed
Hounslow	1 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	1 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	6	1 × 2 bed 4 × 3 bed	4 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed
Islington	4 × 1 bed 5 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × bedsit 2 × 1 bed 5 × 2 bed 4 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	2 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	12	5 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed 2 × 4 bed	3 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 5 × 3 bed 2 × 4 bed
Kensington and Chelsea	1 × 1 bed	1 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed	1 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	2	1 × bedsit 1 × 3 bed	1 × bedsit
Kingston upon Thames	1 × 1 bed	1 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed		1	1 × 3 bed	1 × 2 bed
Lambeth	3 × 1 bed 9 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	1 × 1 bed 5 × 2 bed 6 × 3 bed 2 × 4 bed	4 × bedsit 2 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 4 × 3 bed	11	2 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed 3 × 4 bed
Lewisham	2 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	3 × 1 bed 9 × 2 bed 6 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	2 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	6	2 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 5 × 3 bed	2 × 1 bed 6 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed
Merton	1 × 1 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	2	2 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 3 bed
Newham	1 × bedsit 6 × 1 bed 12 × 2 bed 4 × 3 bed 4 × 4 bed	2 × 1 bed 10 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed 2 × 4 bed	2 × 1 bed 10 × 2 bed 5 × 3 bed	13	16 × 1 bed 7 × 2 bed 7 × 3 bed 3 × 4 bed	2 × 1 bed 10 × 2 bed 10 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed
Redbridge	2 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	2 × 2 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed	0		2 × 1 bed
Richmond upon Thames	1 × 2 bed	1 × bedsit		0	1 × 1 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed
Southwark	4 × 1 bed 11 × 2 bed 10 × 3 bed 3 × 4 bed	1 × bedsit 6 × 1 bed 8 × 2 bed 5 × 3 bed 1 × 5+ bed	7 × 1 bed 7 × 2 bed 8 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	14	4 × 1 bed 5 × 2 bed 12 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	2 × 1 bed 8 × 2 bed 6 × 3 bed
Sutton	1 × 3 bed	1 × 2 bed 1 × 5+ bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	3	1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 3 bed
Tower Hamlets	2 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 4 × 3 bed	1 × bedsit 6 × 1 bed 7 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed	1 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	10	10 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed	4 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed 3 × 3 bed 1 × 4 bed
Waltham Forest	2 × 1 bed 5 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	8	2 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	1 × 1 bed 1 × 2 bed
Wandsworth	1 × 1 bed 3 × 2 bed 1 × 3 bed	2 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed	4 × 1 bed 4 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	3	2 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed	2 × 1 bed 2 × 2 bed 2 × 3 bed

Local Authority	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Westminster	1 × bedsit 3 × 1 bed 1 × 4 bed	1 × bedsit 3 × 1 bed	1 × 4 bed	2	1 × 1 bed	1 × bedsit 1 × 1 bed
Total	5 × bedsit 58 × 1 bed 85 × 2 bed 47 × 3 bed 12 × 4 bed	8 × bedsit 63 × 1 bed 86 × 2 bed 53 × 3 bed 10 × 4 bed 4 × 5+ bed	11 × bedsit 46 × 1 bed 85 × 2 bed 43 × 3 bed 5 × 4 bed		10 × bedsit 69 × 1 bed 51 × 2 bed 65 × 3 bed 10 × 4 bed	4 × bedsit 47 × 1 bed 54 × 2 bed 51 × 3 bed 10 × 4 bed
Moves from RSLs (location and property size not recorded)	—	—	9	8	9	25
Total	207	224	199	166	214	191

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many appeals against the valuation of a property being sold under the right-to-buy scheme have been submitted in London in each year since 1980; and how many of those appeals resulted in a reduction in the valuation. [74267]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Figures for the number of appeals against Right to Buy valuations in London are only available from 1992 onwards, information prior to this date is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. They are as follows:

Year	*Appeals against valuations by local authorities*	*Appeals against valuations by Registered Social Landlords*
1992–93	2,311	27
1993–94	1,300	25
1994–95	757	18
1995–96	705	4
1996–97	715	2
1997–98	920	6
1998–99	1,041	4
1999–2000	1,615	39
2000–01	2,008	42
2000–02	1,758	80
Totals	*13,130*	*247*

Information on the number of appeals that resulted in a lower valuation is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

A review of the system for valuing properties for Right to Buy purposes is in progress. The results will be made publicly available when the project is completed.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the popularity of the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme among older tenants in London. [74153]

Mr. Tony McNulty: No recent assessment has been made of the popularity of the Scheme.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to require boroughs in London which have received above expected Approved Development Programme funding from the Housing Corporation to make a proportion of new lettings available to applicants from boroughs with lower than expected ADP funding. [74260]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The Housing Corporation will be working closely with London boroughs to agree a framework across London for the pooling of nominations for new lettings on a sub-regional basis, similar to those in existence under the London Housing Partnership programme, to widen choice and promote cohesive communities.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact that the Rent Rebate Subsidy Limitation regulations have on a local authority's capacity to finance the revenue costs of concierge security schemes. [74148]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Each local authority has a responsibility to balance its Housing Revenue Account, and to decide what services it can provide taking account of its income e.g. from rents and HRA subsidy.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to establish separate funding provision for *(a)* new social and affordable housing, *(b)* repair and regeneration of social sector stock, and *(c)* funding of housing market renewal; and if he will make a statement. [73944]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The 2002 spending review settlement has provided an extra £1.4 billion for housing over three years. This will help to provide well-designed, affordable homes where they are needed, improve stock conditions in both the social and the private sectors, and tackle low demand through significant funding for the pathfinder projects.

Current arrangements channel most funding for new affordable housing through the Housing Corporation, and for repair of social stock through local authorities.

My right hon. Friend The Deputy Prime Minister announced on 18 July, *Official Report*, Hansard, (col. 438) that he plans to bring housing investment into a single regional pot, to ensure that housing investment decisions are brought together with planning for housing, and linked with regional economic and transport strategies. He is carefully considering the best way forward and will announce the details in due course.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to expand the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme. [74154]

Mr. Tony McNulty: There are currently no plans to expand the Seaside and Country Homes Scheme. However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working with HOMES, North British Housing

Association and the London Borough of Bromley (on behalf of the London Boroughs) to review the workings of the scheme in order to improve the efficiency of its operation.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many households in London are one or more bedrooms below the bedroom standard, broken down by local authority. [74145]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The information requested for London, together with comparable data for England, is given in the table below.

Information for individual local authorities is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Households Below the Bedroom Standard[1]: 2001–02[2]

	Thousand	*Per cent.*
London	175	6
England	501	2

Source:
Survey of English Housing, ODPM

[1] Bedroom standard is an indicator of occupation density. A notional number of bedrooms are allocated to each household in accordance with its age/sex/marital status composition and the relationship of the members to each other. This is then compared with the actual number of bedrooms (including bed-sitters) available for the sole use of the household.

[2] Information for 2001–02 is provisional.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research he has commissioned into the Housing Health and Safety Rating System since July 2001; what the terms of reference are for that research; who is undertaking it; and when he expects it to be published. [74143]

Mr. Tony McNulty: We are currently running three research projects relating to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The first, which began in January 2001, is to develop the statistics to support the system, and is being carried out by Warwick University with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The second, which began in August 2001, is an evaluation project, by DTZ Pieda, to identify the practical lessons to be learned from the publication of Version 1 of HHSRS in July 2000. The third, which began in September 2001, is to produce the guidance needed to assist local authorities in the application of HHSRS specifically to houses in multiple occupation, and is being carried out by the Building Research Establishment. Reports on these projects are expected to be published by the end of this year. This work will inform the production of Version 2 of HHSRS, which we expect to commission in time for publication next autumn as part of a comprehensive package of guidance.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent assessment he has made of the size and type of accommodation suitable as an alternative to LA and RSL tenants underoccupying their current accommodation; and what measures he has taken to encourge LAs and RSLs in areas of high demand to ensure that this type of accommodation is included in new developments. [74156]

Mr. Tony McNulty: No such assessment has been carried out by the Government. However, local authorities in their role as strategic housing authorities are required to assess the type of accommodation required in their areas. Local authorities may also require a proportion of affordable housing as part of new developments, often built by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and funded by the Housing Corporation. RSLs must ensure that bids for capital investment in social housing fit with local authority and regional priorities and the Housing Corporation's National Investment Strategy.

Over the next ten years, the Government will encourage councils and housing associations to set their rents to within 5 per cent. of the levels given by a national formula that reflects a property's size, location and condition. This will give tenants the choice over paying more for a larger property in a high cost area, or saving money by renting a smaller property.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to replace the current overcrowding standards; and if he will make a statement. [74144]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The Government has no immediate plans to replace the overcrowding standard. But it is considering the extent to which overcrowding can be tackled through a new health and safety enforcement regime for housing, based on the new health and safety rating system.

The Government intends to legislate to introduce the new enforcement regime as a replacement for the fitness standard when Parliamentary time allows.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent assessment he has made of the impact of concierge security schemes on anti-social behaviour in local authority tower blocks. [74147]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not made a recent assessment of the impact of concierge security schemes on anti-social behaviour in local authority tower blocks.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost of the Millennium Dome to public funds has been. [73801]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), which was responsible for building the Dome and running of the Millennium Experience, was allocated £628 million of National Lottery funds from the Millennium Commission for the Millennium Experience, which included the associated national programme of events across the UK as well as the Dome at Greenwich. NMEC is currently in solvent liquidation and it is expected that some £25 million of this grant facility will not be required.

Up to the end of July this year, English Partnerships (EP) had incurred a total cost of £21.4m. This includes, from 1 July 2001—when EP took over the ownership of the Dome—£3.3m for the management, maintenance and security of the Dome; £6.5m for decommissioning the contents of the Dome and its site in preparation for the future long term use; and £4.9m in connection with the sale process. It also includes £6.7m for the previous

competition to find a long-term use for the Dome. All of these costs incurred by EP in relation to the Dome will be recovered from sale proceeds.

Property Prices (Taunton)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effects of the change in property prices in Taunton since 1999; and if he will make a statement. [74110]

Mr. Tony McNulty: According to the Department's Survey of Mortgage Lenders, house prices in South West England rose by 31.8 per cent. during the three years 1999 to 2001. According to HM Land Registry figures the average price of residential property sold in Taunton Deane was £85,097 in 1999 and £109,530 in 2001.

Homeownership is affordable for most people. Homeowners are benefiting from low interest rates, low unemployment and robust income growth. For people purchasing a home in South West England during 2001, total mortgage payments averaged 17.44 per cent. of their income. This compares to 28.42 per cent. of income in 1990, and is lower than 1999 (17.91 per cent.) and 2000 (19.43 per cent.).

However, we are well aware that there can be serious problems for many first time buyers in areas of high demand. We are committed to improving people's housing choices, and to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home. Our aim is to deliver new affordable housing where it is needed most, in more sustainable forms.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers

Harry Cohen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in relation to communications data as defined in RIPA, how many officials from his Department he estimates will be authorised to seek access to communications data; how many times officials have sought access to such data from communications providers including Internet service providers under the Data Protection Act 1998 in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [74588]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: No officials in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister or its Agencies are engaged in law enforcement activities requiring them to be authorised to access communications data as defined in Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

Parish Councillors (Model Code of Conduct)

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to request parish councils to indicate how many of their parish councillors have been resigned in response to the introduction of the Model Code of Conduct for Parish Councils. [74229]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: We have no plans to request such information from parish councils.

Personation

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he proposes to introduce to prevent personation for the local elections to be held on 1 May 2003. [74760]

Mr. Nick Raynsford: We have no evidence to suggest that personation will be a significant problem at local elections in May 2003, and have no plans to introduce any new specific measures to prevent personation.

In our prospectus, issued in September 2002, inviting councils to propose pilot voting schemes in the May 2003 local elections, we have made clear that such schemes would need to ensure that any new method of voting is at least as secure, if not more secure, than conventional electoral practices. The Electoral Commission will, as required by statute, be consulted before any pilot schemes are approved. The programme of pilots itself will be looking at new ways to incorporate specific measures to test security and fraud.

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the *(a)* national budgetary contribution to, *(b)* role of and *(c)* national representation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities; when he last met representatives from that group; and if he has made representations on this body to the Foreign Office in the context of the Convention on the Future of Europe. [73861]

Mr. Christopher Leslie: Member states of the Council of Europe (CoE), including the UK, make no direct budgetary contribution to the Congress of local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), which is a consultative body within the CoE consisting of local and regional elected representatives from each of the 44 member states. CLRAE is funded through the CoE's ordinary budget as provided by member states and as agreed by the CoE's Committee of Ministers.

CLRAE has a Regional and a Local Chamber, membership of which is on the basis of nomination by member states' governments according to the requirements of the CLRAE founding charter. The UK has 9 full and 9 substitute seats in each Chamber. The UK's nomination procedure provides for a balanced representation of local and regional interests; all UK appointees must hold an electoral mandate in a UK local authority, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly, or the GLA.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met the leader of the UK's CLRAE delegation at the recent World Environment Conference in Johannesburg. Within the Central Local Partnership my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe and I regularly meet representatives of local government, including members of the UK CLRAE delegation, to discuss European issues, including the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe.

Homelessness

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many families were living in bed and breakfast accommodation in *(a)* East Worthing and Shoreham and *(b)* West Sussex in each year since 1997. [73926]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The East Worthing and Shoreham Parliamentary constituency is covered by Adur DC and part of Worthing DC. Information reported by these and other councils in West Sussex on

the total number of households—including couples and single persons without children—accommodated in bed and breakfast units under statutory homelessness provisions at the end of March in each year since 1997 is summarised below.

*Homeless Households in Bed and Breakfast Accommodation as at 31 March**

	Adur DC	*Worthing DC*	*All DCs in West Sussex*
1997	not reported	*39*	*65 (estimated)*
1998	*5*	*47*	*79*
1999	*3*	*37*	*74*
2000	*3*	*37*	*74*
2001	*14*	*22*	*81*
2002	*17*	*18*	*128*

Note:
* includes households accommodated pending completion of enquiries by the local authority.
Sources:
1997: P1(E) housing return (quarterly)
1998 onwards: Housing Investment Programme returns (annual)

Earlier this year the Government announced a new commitment to ensure that by March 2004 no family with children will be placed in B&B other than in an emergency, and even then for no more than 6 weeks. This was accompanied by changes in Housing Benefit subsidies to make leasing self-contained temporary accommodation more cost effective, and an additional £35 million to help local authorities find alternatives to B&B.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last met the Director of the Homelessness Unit. [73927]

Mr. Tony McNulty: My right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister regularly meets officials in the course of his official duties.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent estimate he has made of the level of homelessness; how he defines a homeless person; and if he will make a statement. [74658]

Mrs. Barbara Roche: At the end of June 2002 81,170 households in England were living in temporary accommodation, including over 6,500 families with children in bed and breakfast hotels, and around 600 people were sleeping rough on any one night.

Under the homelessness legislation (Housing Act 1996), a person is "statutorily homeless" if they do not have accommodation which they have a legal right to live in, which is physically available to them and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to occupy.

In March 2002, the Homelessness Directorate published a report "More than a Roof", which outlined the Government's new approach to tackling homelessness funded by £125 million over this year. The Homelessness Act 2002 will also bring about radical change in the way that central and local government, and all other partners, work together to tackle homelessness. For the first time ever, local authorities will be required to carry out a review and develop a strategy for their area that prevents homelessness and provides solutions for people who are, or who may become homeless.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is taking to tackle homelessness in rural areas. [73988]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The Homelessness Directorate's report "More than a roof", sets out specific measures to tackle homelessness backed up by a £125 million investment over the next year. The Homelessness Directorate has provided a total of over £3.7 million to local authorities in rural areas over the next year to fund schemes such as mediation services for family and couples in relationship difficulties; additional support for women fleeing domestic violence; rent deposit guarantee schemes to help homeless people find housing in the private sector; court and landlord advice services to reduce evictions; and debt and welfare counselling to help people sustain their tenancies.

Pathfinder Renewal Project

Mr. Pike: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will announce the resources allocation for the Pathfinder Renewal Project. [74248]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The 2002 spending review settlement has provided an extra £1.4 billion for housing. This will help to provide well-designed, affordable homes where they are needed, improve stock conditions in both the social and the private rented sectors, and tackle low demand through significant funds for the pathfinder projects. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is giving careful consideration to the best use of this additional funding to deliver sustainable communities. My right hon. Friend has said that he will report back to the House at the turn of the year.

Local Government

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister where responsibility will lie for *(a)* police, *(b)* waste disposal and *(c)* fire services in new unitary authorities. [73354]

Mr. Nick Raynsford: The Regional Governance White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice*, published in May, sets out the Government's plans to establish unitary local authorities in place of existing county and district councils in those regions where people vote in a referendum for elected regional assemblies. In any region where the Government decides that a referendum should take place, the Boundary Committee for England will carry out a review and recommend the best unitary arrangements for the two-tier parts of that region. A referendum will then be held to see whether people support the creation of an elected assembly. The new unitary arrangements will be implemented if—but only if—a majority of those voting in the referendum voted for an elected regional assembly.

Where new unitary arrangements are introduced, we would expect that existing police authorities would remain in place. Appointments to these authorities would be made either by unitary districts or by the unitary county council, depending on the new unitary structure.

There are currently combined fire authorities in former county areas which have only unitary local authorities; and also in areas where there are one or more unitaries, district councils and a county council.

Where changes lead to district-based unitaries in future, we would expect there to be a combined fire authority, but where they lead to a unitary county with no existing or new district-based unitaries, we would expect the county council to remain responsible for providing fire services. This is without prejudice to our consideration of any recommendations on the organisation of the fire service that Professor Sir George Bain's recently announced review might make.

Waste disposal is currently a responsibility of county councils and would become a responsibility of unitary authorities where these are established in future in regions that have an elected assembly.

Regional Governance

Joyce Quin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the outcome of the consultation on the White Paper on Regional Governance. [74098]

Mr. Nick Raynsford: The White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice* formally invited comments on stakeholder involvement with elected regional assemblies; the closing date for responses was 31 August 2002. But the White Paper also offered the opportunity for general views to be submitted—there is no deadline for these views and comments are still being received.

To date, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received around 1,100 representations on the White Paper, of which around 200 offered comments on stakeholder involvement with elected assemblies

In addition, we have received around 1,500 postcards in support of the Cornish Constitutional Convention campaign for a referendum on establishing a Cornish Assembly.

We are currently undertaking detailed assessments of stakeholder responses, and of general responses to the White Paper. These will be published on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website later in the year. We will then set out our further proposals on stakeholder involvement, taking into account views expressed in the consultation.

It remains the case that we intend to introduce a Bill to provide for referendums and associated local government reviews as soon as Parliamentary time allows, with the aim of enabling the first referendums to be held during this Parliament.

Local Authority Referendums

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the average turnout for referendums held by local authorities to establish opinion on local issues. [74215]

Mr. Nick Raynsford: Information about turnout for those referendums which local authorities hold voluntarily is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The average turnout in binding referendums which councils held between June 2001 and October 2002 on whether or not their area should have a directly elected mayor was 29 per cent., within a range of 10 per cent. to 64 per cent.

Rural Housing

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans his Department has to encourage the provision of more affordable housing in rural communities. [73831]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The Government recognises that there is a shortage of affordable housing in many rural towns and villages. The need can be for both homes to rent and to buy.

We expect all local authorities to develop housing strategies and to develop local housing need assessments as part of their long-term plans. We believe that judicious use of their planning powers can deliver more affordable housing.

By next year, we expect to deliver around 9,000 affordable homes annually in rural areas, including 3,000 in small settlements. Of these, a proportion will be for low-cost home ownership.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 16 October 2002

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Competitiveness Council

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Competitiveness Council on 30 September. [74945]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I represented the UK at the Competitiveness Council of Ministers in Brussels on 30 September. This was the first meeting of the new Competitiveness Council, which is an amalgamation of the Internal Market, Industry and Research formations.

The five specific programmes of the sixth R&D Framework programme were adopted and there was political agreement on legislative dossiers covering public procurement (the utilities directive) and fertilisers (fertilisers regulation). In addition, there was political agreement on two company law dossiers: the updating of the First Company Law Directive on filing and disclosure of company documents in the light of new technology; and the modernisation of the EU Accounting Directives to take account of the adoption of International Accounting Standards as the reporting regime for the EU's listed companies.

Council Conclusions were adopted endorsing the Commission's Action Plan on Better Regulation and its rapid implementation.

There was a Presidency report on the proposed discussions at the Nyborg informal, of the methods of working of the new CC formation and a progress report on the proposed 25 amendment (including some overlap with the 23 amendment) to the marketing and use of dangerous substances directive to include controls on further carcinogens, mutagens and substances toxic to reproduction.

There were Commission presentations on the streamlining of the annual economic and employment policy co-ordination cycles and two reports: the State of the Internal Market for Services and Second Biennial Report on Mutual Recognition in the Internal Market.

The Commission also reported that bilateral talks with Korea had failed to reach agreement, and the Commission confirmed that it would now implement the decision as agreed by the Council in June—namely to launch the WTO case against Korea together with the reintroduction of the limited and temporary shipbuilding subsidies.

Over lunch Professor Jaap Winter reported on the consideration by the High Level Group on Company Law of corporate governance issues in the light of large-scale corporate collapses in the US. The Group's approach was to explore ways in which to improve standards of corporate governance, where necessary, and strengthen the role of shareholders within a flexible EU framework. When the formal session resumed conclusions supporting the development of an EU Action Plan were adopted without debate.

The UK voted in favour of political agreement on the public procurement directive and fertilisers regulation as well as the updating of the First Company Law Directive and the modernisation of the EU Accounting Directives. The UK was also in favour regarding the adoption of the five specific programmes of the sixth R&D Framework programme and the Council conclusions, on the Commission's Action Plan on Better Regulation and on the development of an EU Action Plan on corporate governance.

Energy Council

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Energy Council on 4 October. [74946]

Mr. Wilson: I represented the UK at the EU Energy Council held in Luxembourg on 4 October.

Discussion at this Council centred on the issue of liberalisation of the EU's electricity and gas markets. There was also a short presentation of the European Commission's proposals for directives for Community-level oil and gas stocks.

The majority of Member States agreed that full legal separation of transmission and distribution system operators was essential for the creation of a genuinely competitive electricity and gas internal market. A minority maintained reserves as they had doubts about the necessity of legal unbundling, arguing that there were other ways to guarantee transparency and fair access to the networks.

Supporting the majority, the UK said the current proposed exemption threshold of 100,000 customers for distribution operators was too high, because it would exclude a large part of the market in some Member States. The UK could not accept the postponement of legal unbundling for those operators until 1 January 2005, since unbundling was as essential for non-household customers as it was for household customers. The UK emphasised that the need for political agreement was particularly important in the light of the increasing consolidation across Europe. If we did not put in place the conditions needed to ensure non-discriminatory access to networks for all market players, and this meant legal unbundling, there was a danger that incumbents might be able to use their dominant positions to thwart competition. The Commission agreed that legal separation of both transmission and distribution network operators was essential, reminding delegations that this need not imply any transfer of assets.

On public service obligations, there was split between those preferring the universal service provisions to apply to all final customers and those, including the UK, wishing to limit them to household customers only.

On energy labelling, most delegations agreed that any labelling system should be simple, cost-effective and accurate.

Discussion on access to gas storage generated strong support for a UK-inspired compromise whereby non-competitive segments of the market would be subject to regulated third party access, while competitive segments could use negotiated access. But some Member States maintained a preference for negotiated access only.

Nearly all Member States emphasised the need to complete the full internal market as soon as possible, supporting the dates of 2004 for opening the non-domestic sector and 2005 for the domestic sector. The Commission agreed on these operative dates, but signalled the possibility of flexibility to achieve consensus.

The Presidency concluded that the EU remained on course to reach political agreement at the next energy Council meeting on 25 November.

A progress report on the electricity cross border Regulation was noted without discussion. The Commission emphasised that it was an essential part of the package.

The Commission presented proposals for two directives containing new arrangements for stocking oil and gas within the Community, explaining that the main objective was to improve security of supply of oil and gas. The Commission argued that the EU's arrangements for emergency oil stocks needed updating to take account of the current political situation; and that the development of gas as a fuel of choice for electricity generation meant that special arrangements were needed to guarantee security of supply, particularly in view of the rising proportion of gas imported into the EU.

The UK disagreed, arguing that the existing oil arrangements of the International Energy Agency had proved to be both flexible and adequate, and that the gas measure was premature until the internal market was functioning properly.

UK Structural Funds Programme

Candy Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what steps his Department has taken to simplify the application process for accessing funding from UK European Structural Funds programmes; and what discussions his Department has had with UK and European partners on the simplification of the application process for accessing funding from UK Structural Funds Programme. [74396]

Alan Johnson: The DTI, in co-ordination with other Government Departments, has been at the forefront of discussion with other Member States and the European Commission on all aspects of simplification of Structural Funds administration. The UK has drafted papers on this issue for consideration by the Structural Funds Management Committees, and as a result of this work, Commissioner Michel Barnier called a meeting of Regional Policy Ministers on 7 October during which the Commission proposals for simplification were discussed. The UK gave its support to these proposals and will be working with the Commission and other Member States on their practical implementation.

PRIME MINISTER

Sir Desmond Morton

Paul Clark: To ask the Prime Minister if an official biography of Sir Desmond Morton is being commissioned. [75045]

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have appointed Mrs. Gill Bennett who is a visiting Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, as the official historian to write the official biography of Sir Desmond Morton.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what archaeological surveys have been conducted by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* the County Archaeological Office and *(c)* English Heritage in respect of the sites identified for development as asylum accommodation centres; if the Government will publish the reports; and what further plans the Government have to commission such surveys. [74520]

Dr. Howells: It is for the developing agency, not the DCMS, the County Archaeologist or English Heritage to undertake archaeological surveys to inform proposals for development.

From the outset of the Accommodation Centre project, archaeology has been dealt with in accordance with government guidance as set out in PPG 16 "Archaeology and Planning". At the site option screening stage, archaeology was one of many factors used to identify sites where an Accommodation Centre might be developed without significant adverse impact to heritage interests, to preclude other sites where unacceptable impacts would occur and to identify those possible sites where desk studies, field evaluation or other archaeological measures would be necessary.

Archaeological desk and field evaluation studies have been commissioned by the Home Office for the Accommodation Centres proposed at Newton, Bicester and Pershore. Field evaluation trenching has also been undertaken at Newton and Bicester, and is under consideration at Pershore.

At Newton and Bicester the results of the desk and field studies have been submitted as part of the planning notification process, and documentation for Pershore will similarly form part of the planning submission. In due course, if development goes ahead any archaeological investigations in advance of development will be published in accordance with government guidance and archaeological best practice.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects the final report of the English National Stadium Review to be published; and if she will make a statement. [75044]

Tessa Jowell: I am today publishing the final report of the English National Stadium Review led by Patrick Carter and placing copies in the Libraries of both

Houses. The report reflects the detail of the agreements concluded by all principal parties on the National Stadium project on 26 September.

I set out on 19 December 2001, *Official Report* columns 291–3, four tests which I expected the Football Association (FA) and Wembley National Stadium Ltd (WNSL) to meet before the offer of Government support to the National Stadium project could be confirmed:

First, an independent assessment of the Multiplex stadium construction contracts. This was undertaken by Cyril Sweett Ltd and copies were placed in the House libraries in May. Since May the contract has changed from a Design, Construct and Finance arrangement to a Design and Construct contract. Cyril Sweett Ltd have therefore reviewed the new contract and produced an addendum report that concludes the new contract remains value for money. I am placing copies of the addendum report in the House libraries today.

Secondly, as I explained in my 7 May statement, *Official Report* columns 21–2, WNSL have made available to the Comptroller and Auditor General papers relating to the project.

Thirdly, corporate governance changes to be made to produce a management structure capable of delivering a complex project within procedures acceptable to the public sector. In addition to the significant strengthening of the WNSL Board, already announced, a range of improved procedures are now in place.

Fourthly, confirmation that financial support was adequate and fully committed. As Patrick Carter's report sets out, this is now the case.

Having reviewed the steps the FA and WNSL have taken since December, last year, and Patrick Carter's assessment of the progress made by WNSL, including his view that on balance my four tests have been met, I have confirmed the Government's support to the National Stadium project which I had first offered in December. I have however also ensured that the public interest in the new National Stadium is protected by stronger safeguards than those secured at the previous project's failed syndication in 2000.

The time has come for Government to stand back as the project moves into the construction phase and is taken forward by the FA and WNSL. But, as Patrick Carter has noted, to safeguard the public interest, the project as a whole will require careful monitoring and with Sport England and the London Development Agency we shall be putting in place new arrangements as recommended by the Office for Government Commerce.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what advice she has received from the Football Association about progress in concluding the financing of the proposed redevelopment of Wembley Stadium; [74298]

(2) what advice she has received from the Football Association about changes in costs, including legal and professional fees, of the proposed redevelopment of Wembley Stadium; [74300]

(3) when she expects the final contracts for the proposed redevelopment of Wembley Stadium to be concluded; and if she will make a statement. [74299]

Mr. Caborn: The contracts relating to the construction of the English National Stadium at Wembley were signed on 26 September. My right hon. Friend has published today the final report of the English National Stadium Review team which included Wembley National Stadium Limited's data on changes to the costs of the project including fees. Copies of the report are available in the House libraries or from my Department's website www.culture.gov.uk.

BBC

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the BBC curriculum online proposal; and when she expects to reach a decision on the proposal. [74314]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently considering the BBC's application for a digital curriculum service, together with the responses to the public consultation, against the criteria set out in the Department's published guidelines on proposed new BBC public services. My right hon. Friend will announce her decision on the application as soon as possible.

Television Licences

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what changes she proposes to the working of the concessionary scheme so that eligibility for concessionary TV licences is not lost when someone under 60 years moves into the beneficiary's sheltered housing; [74538]

(2) how many representations from *(a)* members of the public, *(b)* charities and *(c)* hon. Members she has received regarding sheltered housing schemes being charged for a television licence because a resident is under 60; and if she will make a statement; [74540]

(3) when the proposals she has to change the working of the concessionary scheme so that eligibility for concessionary TV licences is not lost when someone under 60 moves into the beneficiary's sheltered housing will be published. [74539]

Dr. Howells: The Government proposes to introduce preserved rights for beneficiaries of the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary television licence scheme when the social mix or the level of warden cover in their sheltered housing change, so long as the accommodation continues to be provided or managed by a local authority, a housing association or a development corporation. We intend to publish amending regulations as soon as possible, but the ARC scheme is complex and it is important that, in amending it, we avoid creating any new anomalies or unnecessary administrative burdens.

Information about the number of representations received on different aspects of the concessionary television licensing arrangements is not recorded separately.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Senegal

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the supply of general purpose machine guns to Senegal, for use as part of a UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [74948]

Mr. MacShane: Following consultations with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry recently approved a licence to export general purpose machine guns to Senegal. These arms will be used by the Senegalese Armed Forces in the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

DRC is subject to an EU arms embargo, imposed by a Declaration of 7/4/1993. The embargo was put in place mainly to ensure the safety of international troops and civilian personnel deployed in the DRC. The decision to grant an exemption does not affect HMG's continued support for the EU arms embargo on the DRC.

The decision to permit export was made on the basis that the equipment is needed by bona fide UN peacekeepers and is proportionate to the humanitarian needs of the Senegalese peacekeepers.

HMG fully supports the Senegalese troops deployed to the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC. The decision underlines our continued support for the work being done by peacekeepers within the country.

Iraq

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what goods on the Military List have recently been approved for export to Iraq. [74949]

Mr. MacShane: Following consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry recently approved a licence to export de-mining equipment to United Nations Office for Project Services in mine clearance operations in Northern Iraq. The export included an electronic hand held exploder that appears on the Military List. The conclusion that this export does not represent a proliferation threat has been reached after careful assessment.

The UN Iraq Sanctions Committee approved this export to Iraq under the Oil for Food programme (OFF). Under OFF Iraq is allowed to export unlimited quantities of oil to fund the purchase of humanitarian goods. The export is consistent with the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Belize

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress to resolve the territorial dispute between Guatemala and Belize. [74950]

Mr. MacShane: The Organization of American States (OAS) concluded its two year process to help the Governments of Guatemala and Belize settle their territorial dispute on 30 September. Detailed proposals drawn up by independent Facilitators appointed by both Governments were presented to the Governments on 16 September, provide the basis for a fair and honourable settlement to this long-standing dispute. We hope both Governments will now seize this historic opportunity.

The Facilitators have recommended some adjustment to the land border, and proposed new maritime limits giving Guatemala an Economic Exclusion Zone and Continental Shelf in the Gulf of Honduras of some 2000 square nautical miles. The Governments of Belize and Honduras have each agreed to contribute 1000 square nautical miles to this zone.

The Facilitators have also recommended the establishment of a tri-national ecological park covering coastal, insular and maritime areas of Belize, Guatemala and Honduras and a substantial Development Trust Fund. Details can be found on the Belize Government's website www.belize.gov.bz/.

At a ceremony in Washington on 30 September marking the end of the facilitation process, Dr. MacShane spoke of the UK's full support for the OAS process. He welcomed the proposals highlighting the potential for investment and economic growth that will result if the referendums that are now due to be held simultaneously in both countries are successful.

HMG believes that the Facilitators have worked patiently and meticulously to produce proposals that are fair and honourable to the Governments of Guatemala and Belize. They represent the best chance yet of settling the dispute. Settlement would also have a global significance, demonstrating that with good will and determination even the most intractable problems can be resolved by negotiation. A settlement would open a new chapter of peace and harmony between the two countries and reduce the risk of potential conflict along the border.

We urge the Governments and civil society of both countries to enter into constructive debate on what a settlement would mean to their populace before putting the proposals to referendums.

Azerbaijan

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the UK will continue to uphold the OSCE embargo on the export of weapons and military equipment to Azerbaijan. [74951]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: HMG remains committed to the OSCE arms embargo against both Azerbaijan and Armenia, which we interpret as covering all goods and technology controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (commonly known as the military list).

In September 2002, the Government approved an export licence application for demining vests for the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Actions.

In January 2002 the Government approved a similar request for protective jackets for demining operations to Azerbaijan.

The decision was made in accordance with our practice occasionally to make an exemption to our interpretation of the embargo by approving exports of non-lethal military goods to humanitarian, media or peacekeeping organisations where it is clear that the embargo was not intended to prevent those exports and there is a strong humanitarian case for them.

European Union Events

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for October; and if he will list the major European Union events for the period between 31 October and April 2003. [75046]

Peter Hain: The information requested is in the table.

Date	*Location*	*Business*
October 2002		
1	Brussels	GAERC
2	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
3–4	Brussels	Convention Plenary: Subsidiarity & Legal Personality working group conclusions; interim reports on Charter & National Parliaments working groups
3–4	Brussels	Transport & Telecommunications Council
8	Brussels	ECOFIN
8	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
10	Copenhagen	EU/India Summit
11–12	Nyborg	Internal Market, Consumer Affairs & Industry Meeting (Ministerial Informal)
14	Brussels	Fisheries Council
14–15	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs & Civil Protection Council
16	Brussels	EU Commission: Annual Report on Candidate Countries
17	Brussels	Environment Council
17	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
20	Luxembourg	EU Trade (Ministers Informal)
21–22	Brussels	General Affairs Council
24–25	Brussels	European Council
28–29	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
28–29	Aalborg	Patent Protection: Ministers & EU Commissioners
28–29	Brussels	Convention plenary: Giscard to release his constitutional text; Charter working group conclusions; preliminary reports on conclusions of Economic Governance and Complementary Competences working groups.
November		
4	Brussels	Culture Council
5	Brussels	ECOFIN
6	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
7	Brussels	Health Council
7–8	Brussels	Convention Plenary—Complementary Competences and Economic Governance working group conclusions; preliminary reports on conclusions of Simplification, National Parliaments, Security and Justice working groups.
11–12	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council
14–15	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumer Affairs & Tourism Council
18–19	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council (± Defence)
21	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
25–26	Brussels	Budget Meeting
25–26	Brussels	Industry & Energy Council
28	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
28–29	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs & Civil Protection Council
December		
2	Brussels	Meeting On Macro Economic Dialogue (Ministerial Trokia)
3	Brussels	ECOFIN
2–3	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
4	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
5	Brussels	Transport & Telecom Council
6	Brussels	Transport & Telecom Council
9	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10	Brussels	Environment Council
12–15	Copenhagen	European Council
16–17	Brussels	Fisheries Council
19	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
20	Brussels	Justice And Home Affairs & Civil Protection Council
20–21	Brussels	Convention Plenary-External Action and Defence working group conclusions
January		
9	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
9	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council (to be confirmed)
16	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
20	Brussels	EUROGROUP (evening)
20	Brussels	Convention Plenary

Date	Location	Business
20–21	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
21	Brussels	ECOFIN
24	Nafplion	Employment Council (Ministerial Informal)
27–28	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council
28	Brussels	EU-ASEAN Ministerial
30	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
February		
5	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
6–7	Brussels	Convention Plenary
10–11	Brussels	AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES Council (to be confirmed)
13	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
17	Brussels	EUROGROUP (evening)
18	Brussels	ECOFIN
20	Brussels	EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE Council (to be confirmed)
22	Thessalonika	Energy Council (Ministerial Informal)
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council Agriculture & Fisheries
26	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
27–28	Brussels	Convention Plenary
27–28	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs Council
28	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
March		
3	Luxembourg	Competitiveness Council
6	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
6	Luxembourg	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
6	Luxembourg	EUROGROUP (evening)
7	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
7	Luxembourg	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
13	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
14–15	Athens	(Informal Defence Meeting)
17–18	Brussels	Convention Plenary
17–18	Luxembourg	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
18–19	Luxembourg	General Affairs & External Relations Council
21	Luxembourg	European Council
27	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
27	Veria	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ministerial Informal)
27–28	Luxembourg	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council)
28	Athens	EU-Rio Group, EU-MERCOSUR
28–29	Veria	Informal Justice & Home Affairs (Veria)
31	Luxembourg	Agriculture & Fisheries Council (to be confirmed)
April		
2	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
3–4	Brussels	Convention Plenary
4	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs
5	Lisbon	Europe—Africa Summit
5	Ioannina	Ministerial Meeting on Education (Informal)
10	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
11–13	Chania	ECOFIN (Informal)
14	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
14	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries
16	Brussels	Signature Of The Accession (Provisional Date)
23	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
24–25	Brussels	Convention Plenary

Georgia

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the appointment of a UK Special Representative for Georgia. [74952]

Mr. Straw: I am committed to finding a way to help Georgia become prosperous, stable and able to live in harmony with its neighbours. This is why I am glad to have appointed Sir Brian Fall as the UK's Special Representative for Georgia, with effect from 1 October. In this capacity Sir Brian will also be the UK Senior Representative on the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary General on Georgia. Sir Brian was formerly H.M. Ambassador to Moscow (1992–95). His experience of the region and his diplomatic skills will be invaluable in helping him fulfil this role.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 16 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mohammad Aamrk Iqbal. [74562]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am informed that due to an administrative error, my right hon. Friend did not receive a reply to his letter of 16 August. I apologise for this. A reply was sent on 7 October.

East Timor

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement, with reference to the documents made public by the Australian Government in September 2000, on the attack at Balibo, East Timor on 16 October 1975. [73697]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In September 2000, the Australian Government published a volume of documents taken from their archives on their relations with East Timor from 1974–76. A number of these documents refer to the deaths of the journalists in the attack on Balibo.

The British Government gave the Australian Government clearance to publish a number of official documents which referred to information obtained from British diplomatic sources.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Racial Harmony

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policies he is planning to improve racial harmony in Britain. [74445]

Beverley Hughes: The Community Cohesion Unit, part of the Home Office, is committed to improving community cohesion which will contribute to improving racial harmony. It supports local authorities and other public bodies to tackle immediate problems in communities; integrating community cohesion into mainstream policy and practice; and developing and disseminating knowledge, experience and expertise to local authorities.

It is, for example, funding a programme of community facilitation to encourage dialogue and tackle local grievances or misunderstandings that threaten good community and race relations. A Ministerial Group has been established from across Government whose role is to ensure that their policies promote community cohesion, and it is working with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), Local Government Association (LGA) and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to produce practical guidance on community cohesion for local authorities. A draft of this guidance was made available earlier in the year.

The new Government PSA target on race equality, on which the Home Office leads, will deliver improvements in race equality and community cohesion over the next three years,

"bringing about measurable improvements in race equality and community cohesion across a range of performance indicators, as part of the Government's objectives on equality and social inclusion" (Home Office PSA 9).

The EC Article 13 Race Directive, which should be transposed into UK law by 19 July 2003, establishes, for the first time, a minimum standard of legal protection from racial discrimination across Europe. The UK's domestic legislation already conforms to most of the provisions of the Directive. However, some technical amendments to the Race Relations Act 1976 will be required in order to implement it. The Government is considering a range of legislative options for achieving this. The Government intends to issue another public consultation exercise on the detailed proposals. This will take place in the autumn.

Crimes Against Children

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to ensure that overseas-recruited *(a)* health workers and *(b)* social workers who are working with children have not been convicted of an offence that relates to crimes against children. [74319]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Minister for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith).

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in his speech to the Labour Party conference on 2 October that forthcoming legislation on sex offenders will include a new order to make those convicted of sexual offences abroad subject to the registration requirements of the Sex Offenders Act if they come to the United Kingdom.

Devolution (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what co-ordination he has undertaken of Departments' assessment of the implications of the entitlement card proposals for the devolved powers of the Scottish Parliament. [71964]

Beverley Hughes: Home Office officials met with counterparts in the Scottish Executive to discuss issues of particular relevance to the devolved administration, prior to the publication of the consultation paper on Entitlement Cards and Identity Fraud. These contacts will continue during the consultation exercise.

The consultation paper states that any legislation to establish an entitlement card scheme would be enacted by the Westminster Parliament, as any scheme would need to operate on a UK-wide basis if it was to be effective as an immigration control measure.

One of the detailed options for the scope of any legislation would allow organisations to link services to a card scheme via their own legislation. Under these arrangements, it will be a matter for the Scottish Executive and Parliament to decide whether to link the services they are responsible for to a card scheme. However, they could not prevent the issuing of a card for purposes which are outside the scope of their powers, for example, the UK card as a travel document in Europe.

Departmental Bodies

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many jobs under the remit of his Department in *(a)* the core department, *(b)* non-departmental public bodies, *(c)* executive agencies and *(d)* independent statutory bodies, organisations and bodies financially sponsored by his Department and other such organisations, are located in (i) Scotland, (ii) England, excluding Greater London, (iii) Greater London, (iv) Wales, (v) Northern Ireland and

(vi) overseas, broken down by *(A)* whole-time equivalent jobs and *(B)* the percentage per individual department, body or organisation. [72728]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* The Home Office's central personnel systems do not track jobs only staff. As staff may share a job, and as a job may be vacant awaiting the posting of staff it is not possible to provide an answer in the form requested without incurring disproportionate cost.

Home Office staff figures in each region and nation of the United Kingdom are published in "Civil Service Statistics" year on year and placed in the Library. Staffing Figures for non-departmental public bodies are published in "Public Bodies 2001".

Home Office Staffing figures as at 1 April 2001 are set out in the table. Information is provided, as at that date, to enable comparisons with other Government departments.

Dept/Body/ Organisation[1]	*Scotland* No. (FTE)	%age	*London* No. (FTE)	%age	*Rest of England* No. (FTE)	%age	*Wales* No. (FTE)	%age	*Northern Ireland* No. (FTE)	%age	*Overseas* No. (FTE)	%age	*Total* (FTE)
Core Home Office including Immigration and Nationality Department[a]	112.8	0.9	8163.9	66.3	3921.0	31.8	54.8	0.4	9.6	0.08	57.6	0.5	12320.5
Fire Service College[c]	0	0	0	0	152.8	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	152.8
Forensic Science Service[c]	0	0	722.6	32.9	1,322	60.34	146.4	6.7	0	0	0	0	2191
Passport & Records Agency[c2]	200.76	7.3	544.48	19.84	1,623.3	59.16	258.64	9.43	116.76	4.26	0	0%	2743.94
Prison Service[c]	1	0	6,400.6	15.3	34,785.9	82.9	777.5	1.9	0	0	0	0	41,965

Notes:
KEY
[a]Core department (excluding agencies)
[b]Non-departmental public body
[c]Executive agency
[d]independent statutory body, organisation or body financially sponsored by the department
[1] Permanent Staff (fte) by Region as per MANDATE figures 31/03/01
[2]Data from Passport & Records Agency is as 8 October 2002

Asylum Seekers

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what contact his Department has had with the Chief Executive of the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the potential impact of establishing an asylum seeker accommodation centre at RAF Turnhouse on council services in Edinburgh; [74184]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with the Director of Education of the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the provision of educational facilities for asylum seekers in RAF Turnhouse; [74185]

(3) what discussions his Department has had with the Director of Social Work of the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the provision of social services for asylum seekers at RAF Turnhouse; [74187]

(4) what discussions his Department has had with the Director of Housing of the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the provision of housing facilities for asylum seekers *(a)* during their stay in and *(b)* after their departure from RAF Turnhouse; [74186]

(5) what consultation his Department has had with the Chief Constable of the Lothian and Borders Police regarding the policing of the area near to an asylum accommodation centre at RAF Turnhouse. [74181]

Beverley Hughes: Following the announcement of the shortlist of eight sites in January, my officials conducted initial consultations, including with the Leader of City of Edinburgh Council and other officers. Detailed consultations will be undertaken if it is decided to submit a planning notification in respect of the Air West Edinburgh site.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the measures taken to deter bogus asylum seekers in the last two years by the EU. [74450]

Beverley Hughes: In December 2002 Council adopted the EURODAC Regulation establishing a computerised central database of fingerprint images, as well as the electronic means for Member States to transmit fingerprint images to the central database. Once operational, expected to be early next year, EURODAC will enable the fingerprints of asylum applicants and certain other third country nationals to be compared to support the application of the Dublin Convention and its successor. This will enable the rapid identification of those seeking to abuse asylum systems by making multiple and differing claims throughout the European Union.

In December 2001 the Laeken European Council called for urgent action to combat illegal migration, itself linked to the making of fraudulent asylum claims. In February 2002, Member States adopted a comprehensive Action Plan, which included measures on border management, readmission agreements and co-ordinating work in source and transit countries. The Seville European Council in June 2002 agreed a range of further measures to combat illegal migration.

Immigration

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people resident in Reading, East became UK citizens in 2001. [74759]

Beverley Hughes: 90,295[1] persons were granted British citizenship in the United Kingdom in 2001. Corresponding information on grants to persons in particular constituencies is not available, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Note:
[1]Provisional

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have entered the UK for the purposes of *(a)* visiting, *(b)* study, *(c)* economic activity, *(d)* family reunion and *(e)* humanitarian protection in each year since 1997. [73748]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested on how many persons have entered the United Kingdom (UK) as visitors, students, for employment related and family reunion purposes are given in the table. The figures given exclude passengers who are not subject to immigration control, i.e. European Economic Area (EEA) nationals and Commonwealth citizens who have the right of abode in the UK.

Passengers, given leave to enter the United Kingdom by purpose of journey, excluding EEA nationals, 1997 to 2001

Purpose of journey	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[P]
Visitors	7,760,000	8,040,000	8,370,000	8,930,000	8,170,000
of which: Business visitors	1,530,000	1,530,000	1,600,000	1,770,000	1,610,000
Students	278,000	266,000	272,000	313,000	339,000
Employment related	145,000	161,000	173,000	179,000	186,000
of which: Work permit holders (including dependants)	62,975	68,385	76,010	91,825	108,825
Working holidaymakers	33,300	40,800	45,800	38,400	35,800
Au pairs	15,295	15,880	14,645	12,870	11,985
Domestic workers	15,640	15,825	14,890	14,290	10,465
Commonwealth citizens with a UK-born grandparent, who are seeking or taking employment	8,350	10,220	11,785	10,930	10,635
Seasonal agricultural workers[1]	9,275	9,450	9,760	10,105	8,390
Investors	25	15	25	50	25
Family reunion	28,570	34,[illegible]	32,780	36,065	33,410
of which: Admitted as a spouse or fiancé(e)	26,385	2[illegible]165	30,320	32,970	29,100
Dependants[2]	2,185	2,545	2,460	3,095	4,310

Notes:
[P] Data are provisional
[1] May be an underestimate of those who work as seasonal agricultural workers as they may enter through other admission categori[illegible]
[2] Excludes those children granted settlement on arrival as it is not possible to separate those travelling independently for family reu[illegible]n from those travelling with their parents. However, in each of the five years shown these total no more than 1,800.
Figures are rounded to the nearest five or to three significant figures

No data are currently available for the number of persons who have entered the UK for the purpose of humanitarian protection. It is not possible to provide information on how many asylum seekers entered the UK in any given period, because some arrive clandestinely and subsequently apply for asylum in-country rather than on arrival at UK ports. Others may enter legally with visas as visitors, or under another immigration status, and subsequently claim asylum.

The table below shows the number of applicants who applied for asylum in the UK, both at port and in-country, in each year between 1997 and 2001.

Applications for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, 1997 to 2001[1]

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[P]
Applications received	32,500	46,015	71,160	80,315	71,365
Applied at port	16,590	23,345	29,455	25,935	25,210
Applied in-country	15,915	22,670	41,700	54,380	46,160

Notes:
[P] Data are provisional
[1] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January 1999 and March 2000. Excludes Kosovars evacuated from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia under the humanitarian operation which began in April 1999 who were granted exceptional leave for 1 year, and a number of grants of temporary exceptional leave given to Kosovars who arrived in the United Kingdom outside the evacuation programme, other than those who applied for asylum whilst in the UK. As at July 2000 the majority of those Kosovars who had arrived under the humanitarian evacuation operation had returned to (FRY) Former Republic of Yugoslavia.
Figures are rounded to the nearest five.

Ronald Biggs

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what effect the marriage of a prisoner to a foreign national has on the rights of *(a)* the marriage partner and *(b)* existing children to (i) remain in the United Kingdom, (ii) hold a British passport and (iii) obtain British citizenship. [73533]

Beverley Hughes: If the prisoner is not, himself, a British citizen or a person settled in the UK, then his status would not confer any entitlement on his spouse and children to remain in the UK. Providing that adequate funds were available, his spouse and children could seek leave to enter the UK for short periods to visit him in prison.

If the prisoner is a British citizen or person settled here, a foreign national marrying him would be able to apply for leave to remain here on the basis of the marriage. The application would be considered on its merits, taking into account the following factors:

the length of the sentence;

whether the marriage is subsisting and the sponsor (that is the prisoner) supports the application and intends to resume co-habitation on release;

whether the spouse is able to maintain and accommodate herself and any dependants without recourse to public funds, given that the sponsor is in prison.

Any dependent children (under 18) could apply for leave to enter or remain in line with the conditions of the spouse.

Marriage to a British citizen does not confer automatic British citizenship on a foreign national. The requirements for naturalisation must still be met, although they are less demanding than for naturalisation of someone not married to a British citizen.

A legitimate child born overseas to a British citizen father and non-British citizen mother may be a British citizen from birth, whilst an illegitimate birth overseas to such parents would usually mean that the child was not a British citizen. However, if the parents of an illegitimate child subsequently marry, and the law of the country in which the father is domiciled legitimates a child of the relationship upon the parents' marriage, the child will be treated as having been born legitimate. The child would then be regarded as a British citizen from birth and would be entitled to enter and remain freely in this country.

A person would not be entitled to hold a British passport without first obtaining British nationality.

Passport and Records Agency

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Passport and Records Agency intends to publish its annual accounts for 2001–02. [75393]

Beverley Hughes: The Passport and Records Agency Accounts 2001–02 has been published today and copies of the Report have been placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him and his predecessor since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43377]

Dr. Moonie *[holding reply 25 March 2002)]:* No unpaid advisers have been appointed by Defence Ministers since June 1997.

For details of unpaid appointments made by the Ministry of Defence to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer provided by my hon. Friend for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 895W–96W.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many overseas visits have been undertaken by parliamentary private secretaries in his Department at departmental expense in each of the last four years; and at what cost to public funds. [36810]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 February 2002]:* Parliamentary Private Secretaries supporting Ministers in this Department have travelled overseas on Government business on three occasions. As military transport was used no additional costs were incurred. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's policy is towards age discrimination. [42581]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence integrated age into its equal opportunity policy some years ago and the Department has a commitment that there should be no unfair discrimination on the basis of age. Action on diversity has and will continue to tackle any negative attitudes, particularly through the training and development of managers and through the monitoring of recruitment, selection and appraisal statistics.

The Ministry of Defence, like other Departments, has reviewed its age retirement policy in light of the Government's commitment to tackle ageism in the workplace as set out in the Code of Practice for Age Diversity in Employment published in 1999 and in the Performance Innovation Unit's Report "Winning the Generation Game". The review concluded that there should be no change. In the MOD, some two-thirds of the workforce have the option to retire anytime between the age of 60 and 65.

Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* purpose was of visits by ministers in his Department to Wales since 1997; and when he next intends to visit Wales. [62074]

Dr. Moonie *[holding reply 17 June 2002]:* Defence Ministers have made the following visits to Wales since 1997:

Dates		
2 March 1999	Clwyd	Visit to RAF Sealand/Defence Aviation Repair Agency
7 March 1999	St Athan	Visit to Defence Aviation Repair Agency
5–6 June 1999	Cwmbran	Rededication of War Memorial
9 June 2000	Chepstow	Visit to Royal Anglian Regiment
9 January 2002	St Athan	Visit to Defence Aviation Repair Agency
7 August 2002	St Athan	Visit to Defence Aviation Repair Agency

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence plans to visit Wales in early November.

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms,

(f) individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by his Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within his Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [74678]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, information on expenditure on external assistance, categorised by type of work and Top Level Budget Holder, is contained in the Ministry of Defence's annual return of expenditure on External Assistance. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House since 1996.

Equipment (Heat and Desert Conditions)

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance criteria and testing procedures relating to possible use in extreme heat and desert conditions were utilised during the procurement processes for *(a)* the Challenger II Tank and its related AS90 self propelled gun, *(b)* items of military clothing, *(c)* C17 transport aircraft and *(d)* radio communication and information systems. [74649]

Dr. Moonie: Performance criteria and testing procedures during the procurement of any equipment or materiel are those required to ensure that the operational requirements set at that time are met. Amongst the criteria used is the Ministry of Defence series of Defence Standards (DEFStans). The performance of equipments that have been in-service for some time is routinely monitored to ensure that they continue to meet operational requirements.

Both the Challenger II Tank and AS90 were procured against a requirement to operate in Northwest Europe. Following the experience of Exercise SAIF SAREEA II, the ability to operate more effectively in Desert conditions is being enhanced through logistic improvements and for AS90, a Desertisation Upgrade Pack.

Military clothing must meet or exceed the relevant European and British quality standards and performance characteristics. Garments are tested for conformity and, for operational clothes, trials are conducted by the user in the required environmental conditions.

The UK C-17 aircraft is an Off-the-Shelf solution to meet the Short Term Strategic Airlift Requirement. The aircraft has been designed, developed, tested and cleared by Boeing and the United States Air Force to operate in a wide range of environments including extreme heat and desert conditions.

The main tactical radio communications system currently in use in the land environment is the Clansman family of radios and ancillaries. Designed for operations, over a temperature range of −40 to +55 degrees centigrade, in combat zones anywhere in the world, Clansman remains just as capable as it always has been to meet the requirement it was delivered against. The Design Authorities provided the temperature operating range when the equipment was procured in the 1970s.

Ptarmigan has been the army's deployable trunk communications system since 1985 and was designed to operate in North West Europe. The three major installations, which provide the backbone of the system, operate primarily within a temperature range of −32 to +45 degrees centigrade. The Ptarmigan system was not designed for the desert environment, but the purchase of additional Generators, Air Conditioners, Thermal Screening Panels, when required, has enabled the system to operate adequately in the desert environment.

The Personal Role Radio (PRR) was first deployed in July 2001. It is designed to meet any environment in which individual soldiers could realistically expect to operate and survive. In particular within a temperature range up to +55C and in dry and desert conditions. The National Audit Office report on Exercise SAIF SAREEA II (paragraph 2.8) states that the PRR performed very well.

Armed Forces Personnel

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent progress has been made to increase the numbers of *(a)* engineers, *(b)* signallers and *(c)* medical services in the armed forces. [74413]

Mr. Ingram: The Armed Forces undertake numerous and varied recruiting and retention initiatives designed to improve the manning levels of all trades and specialisations which are experiencing, or which are predicted to encounter, shortfalls. Those undertaken to boost levels of engineers, signallers and medical services personnel are bearing fruit. In the Army, in the first six months of 2002–2003, RE enlistments are up 33 per cent., REME enlistments up 24 per cent., R Signals enlistments up 24 per cent. and AMS enlistments up by 7 per cent., over the corresponding period last year. These specialist groups are amongst those that are subject to close scrutiny because of the potential impact that any shortfalls might have on operational capability.

Defence Bills Agency

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the performance targets for the Defence Bills Agency for the financial year 2002–03 will be revised following the appointment of a new chief executive. [74942]

Dr. Moonie: The Department and the new Chief Executive have reviewed the targets set for the Defence Bills Agency for the financial year 2002–2003. As a result, it was decided that there was scope for further tightening of the already high standards of service provided by the Agency since its formation in 1996. The Key Targets are now as follows:

1. To make a progressive reduction in the unit costs of output for bills and invoices of between 15 per cent. and 20 per cent. by March 2004; specific annual targets to be agreed with the Owner.

2. Produce accounting and financial information to the ISO 9001–2000 quality standard and to the times set out in the 1999 Service Level Agreement with MOD Centre.

3. To pay 99.9 per cent. of correctly presented bills within 11 calendar days of receipt as part of the Department's 30-day payment target.

4. To raise 97 per cent. of invoices accurately within 4 days of receipt of a correctly authorised claimable document.

5. Reduce the overdue collectable debt to 35 per cent. of total collectable debt (based on a 6 month rolling average).

6. To make a progressive improvement of at least 2 per cent. in the overall level of customer satisfaction compared with the targets set in 2000–2001.

The change to key target number 3 is an effective increase in the challenge to the Agency since previous performance was rounded to the nearest per cent.

Housing

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much military service personnel housing is owned by his Department in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* overseas. [54643]

Dr. Moonie: pursuant to his reply, 19 September 2002, *Official Report*, column 316W. The figure for housing in England, Scotland and Wales was incorrect. This figure should have read 52,600 not 2,600 as printed in the *Official Report*. Similarly, the number of Quarters owned or leased by the Ministry of Defence under PFI arrangements should read 7,600, not 7,000.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the assistance pledged for Afghanistan at Tokyo in January has been provided; and if she will make a statement. [74947]

Clare Short: At the Tokyo conference in January 2002, bilateral and multilateral donors pledged a total of $4.5 billion (about £2.9 billion) over five years, for both reconstruction and continuing humanitarian needs. The UK pledge was £200 million (about $285 million) over 5 years. Of the $1.8 billion pledged at Tokyo for 2002, the UN estimate that just over $1.3 billion (60 per cent.) has so far been disbursed. Humanitarian appeals are currently funded at between 75 per cent. and 90 per cent. for the larger UN agencies; however, initial estimates contained in the UN Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme document are now widely perceived to be an underestimate, as needs are likely to increase with the coming winter.

I have increased our commitment from £1.8 million to £55 million this financial year for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance for Afghanistan. Of this amount, about £21.5 million has already been disbursed, mainly through UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs, for humanitarian and early recovery assistance. We have also channelled £10 million through the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. Of the additional £15 million recently made available for this financial year, £11 million will help meet immediate needs, including support for the on-going refugee return programme and humanitarian requirements throughout the forthcoming winter. I have also placed a Briefing on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Equality Commission

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what decisions he has reached on appointments to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. [74939]

Mr. Browne: The reappointment of sixteen of the existing Commissioners, including the Chief Commissioner, Joan Harbison, and the Deputy Chief Commissioner, Bronagh Hinds took effect on 16 August 2002.

The other Commissioners reappointed are:

Jeremy Bryson
Harry Coll
Paul Donaghy
Alan Henry
John Heron
Ann Hope
Ruth Lavery
Stephen Livingstone
Margaret Logue
Harry McConnell
Robin Mullan
Bob Osborne
Monica Wilson
Noreen Wright

The reappointments are for varying terms of up to three years. In addition, the Secretary of State proposes to advertise for new appointments to the Commission in the next few months. In this way we hope to ensure the optimum balance between continuity and fresh thinking on the Commission as it continues its important task of promoting equality of opportunity.

Oversight Commissioner Report

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the latest report received from the Oversight Commissioner. [74940]

Jane Kennedy: The Oversight Commissioner's second statutory report for 2002 was published on 10 September and a copy was laid before the House in accordance with section 68(4)*(a)* of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

CABINET OFFICE

The Royal Prerogative

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will issue guidance to Government Departments requiring them to keep records of every decision taken using the Royal Prerogative and to place such records in the Library every 12 months. [71682]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer provided by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on 25 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 802W.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

National Forest Company

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will report on the National Forest Company's progress in creating the National Forest in the East Midlands. [74943]

Margaret Beckett: I have arranged for copies of the National Forest Company's Annual Report and its Accounts for 2001–2002 to be placed in the House libraries.

Habitats Directive

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes are planned to improve implementation of EC Directive 92/43/EEC (the Habitats Directive) where European-protected species are found on development sites in England. [74944]

Mr. Morley: The Government has decided it is necessary to make improvements to the arrangements for the implementation of the Habitats Directive in respect of European protected species and the land-use planning regime in England.

We are proposing, with the agreement of my noble Friend, Lord Rooker, Minister for Planning, to improve the protection afforded to these threatened species by integrating the requirements of the Directive within the land-use planning process, ensuring consideration of all the relevant issues within the planning process rather than in two separate regimes. Officials in Defra and the ODPM have worked closely together in drawing up the proposals and a public consultation will be published shortly.

The proposals should improve the implementation of the Habitats Directive by ensuring that planning authorities take the Directive's provisions relating to European protected species, such as great crested newts and bats, fully into account in considering development applications. The proposals will also reduce the regulatory burden on business by integrating the two regimes and thereby removing the need for a separate consent to be sought following grant of planning permission. It will therefore be a quicker, more streamlined and effective process.

In the interim period, our Department will continue to operate the licensing system for developments affecting European protected species but with some administrative improvements.

Slaughtering

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what dates slaughters have occurred on dangerous contact premises since 30 September 2001; if she will list *(a)* the number of premises and animals involved on each occasion broken down by type, *(b)* the numbers tested, with details of the types of test carried out and the results on each occasion, *(c)* the locations of the disposal sites of carcasses and method of disposal and *(d)* the number of premises and animals that were additionally slaughtered out on other premises as a result of the identification of infection of premises relating to these activities; and if she will make a statement. [74699]

Margaret Beckett: The information requested is set out in the following table.

Slaughters that have occurred on dangerous contact premises since the last case of foot and mouth disease on 30 September 2001

Date individual seropositive animal bled	*Reason for testing*	*Initial Result*	*Rebleed requested*	*No. of animals at time of sampling*	*No. of animals slaughtered*	*Method of disposal*	*Location of disposal site*	*Probang sample and Final result*
01/10/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	57	57 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
04/10/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	653	1 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
09/10/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	100	95 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
12/10/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	402	387 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
16/10/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	176	2 goats	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
20/10/01	Pre-movement	Seropositive	Yes	266	1 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
24/10/01	Pre-movement	Seropositive	Yes	105	1 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
26/10/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	1280	1 sheep	Mass burial	Tow Law	No virus detected by probang
30/10/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	148	1 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
31/10/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	407	360 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
4/11/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	2067	9 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
05/11/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	129	129 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
05/11/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	2000	1 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang

Slaughters that have occurred on dangerous contact premises since the last case of foot and mouth disease on 30 September 2001

Date individual seropositive animal bled	*Reason for testing*	*Initial Result*	*Rebleed requested*	*No. of animals at time of sampling*	*No. of animals slaughtered*	*Method of disposal*	*Location of disposal site*	*Probang sample and Final result*
6/11/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	584	68 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
17/11/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	591	1 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
04/12/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	1539	1 sheep	Render	Lancaster	No virus detected by probang
18/12/01	Serosurveillance	Seropositive	Yes	2067	2067 sheep	Render	Bradford	No virus detected by probang
03/01/02	Pre-movement test	Seropositive	Yes	332	2 sheep	Render	Bradford	No virus detected by probang
17/01/02	Restocking	Seropositive	Yes	156	1 sheep	Render	Widnes	No virus detected by probang
15/02/02	Restocking	Seropositive	Yes	170	1 sheep	Incineration	Stratford-Upon-Avon	No virus detected by probang
05/03/02	Restocking	Seropositive	Yes	424	1 sheep	Incineration	Stratford-Upon-Avon	No virus detected by probang

Notes:
The tests used was the Competitive ELISA test.
Seropositives had probang tests carried out after slaughter. This was to try and isolate virus rather than just antibody.
All probangs returned negative results.
If a positive result had returned the farm would have been designated an Infected Premises.
No premises were slaughtered out as dangerous contacts as a result of these cases.

Timber

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance she provides on the timber procurement strategy. [74602]

Mr. Meacher: Advice on the timber procurement strategy is currently given in Section 3 of the Green Guide for Buyers. A copy is on the "Sustainable Development in Government" web site, which also includes other guidance on the subject. URL:http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sdig/improving/contextf.htm.

My officials have also provided Departments with a model specification clause for inclusion in contracts for timber procurement. Ministers do however recognise that better guidance is required if buyers are to be fully equipped to resolve the complexities involved in procuring timber and timber products from legal and sustainably managed sources. This is one of the issues addressed by consultants in their report on the timber scoping study that was commissioned by Defra in October 2001 and is currently under consideration. A copy of the report is on the Tropical Forest Forum's web site. Look in Forum activities/Trade/Timber Trade at http://www.forestforum.org.uk.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many educational maintenance allowances are available; and at what annual cost. [74631]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* Education Maintenance Allowances are available to all those young people who are resident in a pilot area, who meet the relevant eligibility criteria for that particular pilot and who meet the conditions of their Learning Agreement. The actual amount the young person receives also depends on the particular variant being piloted in their area. Take-up of EMA varies from one LEA area to another depending on the variant being tested and on the level of marketing carried out by the LEA and other local partners. In the last academic year over 120,000 young people benefited from EMA across all pilot areas. This figure will increase again this year when the pilot scheme reaches steady state with two cohorts of young people in all 56 areas. The cost of the scheme, including evaluation and other related pilot activity, was slightly over £99 million for the last financial year.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she has completed evaluation of the pilot education maintenance allowances. [74630]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* The evaluation of the EMA pilots began in Spring 1999 and is scheduled for completion next year. The evaluation was designed with two purposes. The first was to determine how effective an EMA approach was in increasing participation, retention and achievement amongst young people from low-income families. The second was to provide evidence on the most effective aspects of the various models being tested.

Evidence from the first two years of the pilots shows that EMAs increased participation in full-time education in Year 12 by 5.9 percentage points among eligible young people. The participation gain was further increased to 7.3 percentage points in Year 13. On this basis we decided to extend EMAs nationally from September 2004. We are now looking to further evidence to inform the development of the most effective model for national implementation.

Full-time Education

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the definition which she uses of full-time education. [74788]

Mr. Miliband: There is no legal definition of full-time education for state maintained schools. In providing full-time education to pupils, LEAs should look to DfES Circulars 7/90 and 11/99 as to the number of hours recommended for pupils at each key stage. Neither circular imposes a statutory requirement on LEAs, but provides guidance only. Circular 7/90 establishes a general guide to good practice on lesson time, which OFSTED echo in their guidance. The suggested weekly lesson times are as follows:

Age	*Hours*
5–7	21
8–11	23.5
12–14	24
14–16	25

Information on Circulars 7/90 and 11/99 can be accessed at www.dfes.gov.uk/guidanceonthelaw/

For further education purposes, students classified for statistical purposes as full-time are defined as those enrolled on programmes of at least 450 guided learning hours per year, or for at least 150 guided learning hours per tri-annual period or more than 16 guided learning hours per week for shorter courses.

For higher education, the Higher Education Statistics Agency's definition is:

"The Funding Councils have agreed that a common definition of full-time is that the years of programme of study must involve a minimum of 24 weeks study."

Student Loans

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will provide monthly loans payments to higher education students. [73971]

Margaret Hodge: We have no plans to do so for 2003/04. Nevertheless, we are looking at what flexibility on payments might be introduced later as part of our programme to modernise student support.

16–19-Year-Olds

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of full-time students stayed in education in the Huntingdon constituency after the age of *(a)* 16 and *(b)* 18 years in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001. [74224]

Margaret Hodge: Data on the percentage of students staying on in full-time education are not calculated for areas smaller than LEAs as reliable estimates cannot be made. Participation rates at sub-national level are only available for 16 and 17 year olds. The latest available data are for end 1999 and are published in the annual statistical bulletin, "Participation in Education and Training by Young People Aged 16 and 17 in Each Local Area and Region, England".

Huntingdon constituency is part of Cambridgeshire LEA. Prior to 1998/99 Cambridgeshire LEA was included in the aggregated Cambridgeshire and Peterborough LEA, therefore two sets of figures are given below. The first columns set out the participation rates for 16 and 17 year olds in full-time education for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough LEA at end 1997 and end 1999; the second group for Cambridgeshire LEA at end 1998 and end 1999:

16 and 17 year olds in full-time education

Age	*Cambridgeshire and Peterborough LEA*		*Cambridgeshire LEA*	
	end 1997	*end 1999*	*end 1998*	*end 1999*
16	71	75	71	75
17	62	59	58	60

Local Initiative Fund Scheme

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what allocations of funding were made by the Greater Manchester Learning Skills Council to each of the boroughs under the Local Initiative Fund Scheme for 2001–02. [74190]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. John Harwood the Council's Chief Executive will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

British Educational Communications and Technology Agency

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made on the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency Quinquennial Review. [75392]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In line with Cabinet Office guidance, the review is being carried out in two stages. I am now in a position to make an announcement about the outcome of Stage 1 and the basis on which work will be taken forward on Stage 2

The Government has today published the report "*Quinquennial Review of the British Educational and Communications Technology Agency (Becta)—Stage 1 October 2002*", copies of which have been placed in the Library.

The report underlines Becta's key role in working with the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that schools and colleges take full advantage of every opportunity to exploit the transformational impact of ICT. The work they do is vital in ensuring that schools and colleges are provided with the best possible advice on a range of ICT issues from procuring value for money equipment to managing websites and, most importantly, ensuring that ICT is embedded in every aspect of teaching and learning.

Many of the recommendations made in the report have already been acted upon by both Becta and the DfES and have been reflected in Becta's Corporate Plan, 2002–05. It provides valuable pointers on the direction in which Becta should be moving. Stage two of the Review will take forward the issues in this report. It will concentrate on the future of Becta, providing greater emphasis on looking at how services and functions could be provided more effectively.

I am looking forward to continuing to work with Becta on our challenging objectives on ICT in schools and ensure that pupils leave education with the ICT skills necessary for the modern workplace.

Disability Rights

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on actions taken by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* other Government departments and *(c)* education providers in connection with the introduction of disability rights to post-16 education. [74667]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) exempted educational institutions from its provisions. Through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, my Department has plugged an unacceptable gap in the DDA to include all bodies responsible for Further and Higher Education and LEA-secured adult and community education, within its provisions.

We are implementing the new duties in three stages:

From 1 September 2002 it is unlawful to discriminate against disabled students by treating them less favourably than others. In addition, responsible bodies have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to provision where disabled students might otherwise be substantially disadvantaged.

From 1 September 2003 responsible bodies will have a duty to make adjustments involving the provision of auxiliary aids and services.

From 1 September 2005 responsible bodies will have a duty to make adjustments to physical features of premises where these put disabled students at a substantial disadvantage.

My Department is working with the Disability Rights Commission, the Learning and Skills Council, the Higher Education Funding Council and other partners in the post-16 sector, to support providers in implementing the new duties with additional funding and guidance. £172m has been allocated over the years 2002–04.

Infant Classes

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children under the age of five years are being taught in infant classes in primary education, broken down by local education authority. [74282]

Mr. Miliband: The available information for maintained primary schools is shown in the table along with, for completeness, figures for under 5's in maintained nursery schools and classes.

Number of Three and Four Year Olds[1,2] in Maintained Nursery and Primary Schools January 2002 (Provisional)

	Pupils in nursery schools and nursery classes	*Pupils in infant classes in primary schools[3]*	*All pupils under 5 in nursery and primary schools*
ENGLAND	*341,221*	*357,496*	*698,717*
NORTH EAST	*28,990*	*19,452*	*48,442*
Darlington	1,214	798	2,012
Durham	5,279	3,686	8,965
Gateshead	1,837	1,422	3,259
Hartlepool	1,248	740	1,988
Middlesbrough	2,166	1,185	3,351
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,488	1,860	4,348
North Tyneside	2,336	1,499	3,835
Northumberland	2,880	2,410	5,290
Redcar and Cleveland	2,031	1,077	3,108
South Tyneside	1,821	1,184	3,005
Stockton-on-Tees	2,330	1,451	3,781
Sunderland	3,360	2,140	5,500
NORTH WEST	*54,226*	*53,532*	*107,758*
Blackburn with Darwen	1,363	1,358	2,721
Blackpool	428	1,094	1,522
Bolton	2,721	2,215	4,936
Bury	1,527	1,390	2,917
Cheshire	3,073	4,999	8,072
Cumbria	3,314	3,520	6,834
Halton	815	937	1,752
Knowsley	2,438	1,309	3,747
Lancashire	5,817	8,737	14,554
Liverpool	4,756	3,390	8,146
Manchester	5,368	3,448	8,816
Oldham	2,198	2,075	4,273
Rochdale	1,904	1,778	3,682
Salford	2,442	1,863	4,305
Sefton	2,566	2,118	4,684
St. Helens	1,479	1,414	2,893
Stockport	2,378	2,164	4,542
Tameside	2,173	1,820	3,993
Trafford	2,120	1,620	3,740
Warrington	1,253	1,558	2,811
Wigan	1,986	2,342	4,328
Wirral	2,107	2,383	4,490

Number of Three and Four Year Olds[1,2] in Maintained Nursery and Primary Schools January 2002 (Provisional)

	Pupils in nursery schools and nursery classes	*Pupils in infant classes in primary schools[3]*	*All pupils under 5 in nursery and primary schools*
YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER	*48,330*	*35,763*	*84,093*
Barnsley	3,010	796	3,806
Bradford	6,333	4,130	10,463
Calderdale	1,678	1,652	3,330
Doncaster	3,225	2,412	5,637
East Riding of Yorkshire	2,012	1,838	3,850
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	3,285	1,359	4,644
Kirklees	3,463	3,348	6,811
Leeds	7,224	5,532	12,756
North East Lincolnshire	1,700	949	2,649
North Lincolnshire	1,283	921	2,204
North Yorkshire	2,460	4,188	6,648
Rotherham	2,667	2,048	4,715
Sheffield	4,502	3,770	8,272
Wakefield	4,458	1,635	6,093
York	1,030	1,185	2,215
EAST MIDLANDS	*30,966*	*27,738*	*58,704*
Derby	2,708	1,709	4,417
Derbyshire	5,611	5,355	10,966
Leicester	3,898	1,750	5,648
Leicestershire	224	4,746	4,970
Lincolnshire	2,461	5,003	7,464
Northamptonshire	3,281	5,051	8,332
Nottingham	4,671	774	5,445
Nottinghamshire	8,009	3,126	11,135
Rutland	103	224	327
WEST MIDLANDS	*42,930*	*42,478*	*85,408*
Birmingham	10,047	9,236	19,283
Coventry	2,677	2,439	5,116
Dudley	2,959	2,481	5,440
Herefordshire	570	1,177	1,747
Sandwell	4,086	2,578	6,664
Shropshire	1,333	1,064	2,397
Solihull	2,127	1,737	3,864
Staffordshire	3,665	7,284	10,949
Stoke-on-Trent	2,492	1,883	4,375
Telford and Wrekin	1,527	665	2,192
Walsall	3,911	2,225	6,136
Warwickshire	2,054	3,774	5,828
Wolverhampton	3,411	1,934	5,345
Worcestershire	2,071	4,001	6,072
EAST OF ENGLAND	*28,564*	*38,233*	*66,797*
Bedfordshire	2,564	2,713	5,277
Cambridgeshire	1,715	4,112	5,827
Essex	3,770	8,569	12,339
Hertfordshire	10,198	8,523	18,721
Luton	1,631	1,527	3,158
Norfolk	2,703	5,563	8,266
Peterborough	427	1,437	1,864
Southend-on-Sea	769	1,283	2,052
Suffolk	3,746	3,548	7,294
Thurrock	1,041	958	1,999
LONDON	*70,921*	*51,725*	*122,646*
INNER LONDON	*30,812*	*19,887*	*50,699*
Camden	1,270	988	2,258
City of London	...	...	...
Hackney	2,254	1,571	3,825
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,762	540	2,302
Haringey	2,736	1,959	4,695
Islington	1,778	1,358	3,136
Kensington and Chelsea	891	611	1,502
Lambeth	2,635	1,718	4,353
Lewisham	2,698	1,894	4,592
Newham	4,771	2,779	7,550
Southwark	3,109	2,116	5,225
Tower Hamlets	3,209	1,958	5,167

Number of Three and Four Year Olds[1,2] in Maintained Nursery and Primary Schools January 2002 (Provisional)

	Pupils in nursery schools and nursery classes	*Pupils in infant classes in primary schools[3]*	*All pupils under 5 in nursery and primary schools*
Wandsworth	2,208	1,587	3,795
Westminster	1,491	808	2,299
OUTER LONDON	*40,109*	*31,838*	*71,947*
Barking and Dagenham	2,150	1,635	3,785
Barnet	2,577	2,244	4,821
Bexley	1,925	1,822	3,747
Brent	2,480	1,962	4,442
Bromley	342	2,337	2,679
Croydon	2,902	2,646	5,548
Ealing	3,590	2,293	5,883
Enfield	1,928	2,427	4,355
Greenwich	3,273	1,078	4,351
Harrow	1,076	1,533	2,609
Havering	948	1,764	2,712
Hillingdon	3,383	2,002	5,385
Hounslow	2,205	1,708	3,913
Kingston upon Thames	1,311	989	2,300
Merton	2,037	1,234	3,271
Redbridge	2,491	1,940	4,431
Richmond upon Thames	840	1,121	1,961
Sutton	1,844	53	1,897
Waltham Forest	2,807	1,050	3,857
SOUTH EAST	*23,843*	*52,900*	*76,743*
Bracknell Forest	767	243	1,010
Brighton and Hove	1,127	1,577	2,704
Buckinghamshire	1,364	3,661	5,025
East Sussex	775	3,433	4,208
Hampshire	785	9,278	10,063
Isle of Wight	158	894	1,052
Kent	1,914	10,573	12,487
Medway	589	2,202	2,791
Milton Keynes	783	1,670	2,453
Oxfordshire	3,567	1,765	5,332
Portsmouth	611	1,379	1,990
Reading	1,759	156	1,915
Slough	1,740	736	2,476
Southampton	473	1,575	2,048
Surrey	3,568	7,312	10,880
West Berkshire	840	752	1,592
West Sussex	1,169	5,194	6,363
Windsor and Maidenhead	1,045	97	1,142
Wokingham	809	403	1,212
SOUTH WEST	*12,451*	*35,675*	*48,126*
Bath and North East Somerset	385	1,199	1,584
Bournemouth	350	1,019	1,369
Bristol, City of	3,553	2,787	6,340
Cornwall	1,652	3,637	5,289
Devon	1,899	4,628	6,527
Dorset	290	2,482	2,772
Gloucestershire	124	4,102	4,226
Isles of Scilly	0	15	15
North Somerset	262	1,334	1,596
Plymouth	984	1,837	2,821
Poole	131	925	1,056
Somerset	655	3,694	4,349
South Gloucestershire	473	2,144	2,617
Swindon	605	1,610	2,215
Torbay	661	857	1,518
Wiltshire	427	3,405	3,832

Notes:

[1]Headcount of children aged three and four at 31st December in the previous calendar year.

[2]Includes two year olds.

[3]Includes reception and other classes not designated as nursery classes

.. Not available. Data not reported by City of London Local Education Authority.

Source:

Annual Schools Census

University Tuition Fees

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much university tuition fees are what they will be next year; and what plans she has to increase this amount. [73382]

Margaret Hodge: In the academic year 2002/03, the maximum student contribution towards tuition fees for full-time undergraduates in England and Wales attending courses at publicly funded institutions of higher education is £1,100. This represents a 2.4 per cent. increase over the corresponding fee rate for the previous year. Fee rates are uprated annually on the basis of price inflation; those for 2003/04 are due to be announced in December.

Student Finance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, when she will publish her review of student finance. [74668]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* We plan to publish our review of student finance later in the Autumn, as part of the strategy document setting out our 10-year vision for the development and reform of higher education.

Skills Council

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what plans she has to create a sector skills council for the voluntary sector. [74638]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* The Sector Skills Development Agency is responsible for discussing and assessing proposals for Sector Skills Councils made by employers. The Agency then advises government about the award of a Sector Skills Council licence having fully considered the strength of the proposal in meeting the rigorous Sector Skills Council standard. Discussions are currently taking place between voluntary sector representatives and the Agency about the prospect of a strong proposal for a Sector Skills Council or what alternative arrangements might better serve this broad sector.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Service

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she intends to publish the Court Service Annual report and Accounts for 2001–02. [75192]

Yvette Cooper: The Court Service Annual Report and Accounts for 2001–2002 has been published today and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions (EU Objectives)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made against the 11 EU objectives for pension systems. [75389]

Mr. McCartney: A copy of the UK National Strategy Report on pensions was placed in the Library on 19 September 2002. The Report is the UK's contribution to the exchange of information and best practice on pensions between Member States agreed by the European Council at Laeken in December 2001. It contains information on current pensions policy.

Major Accident Hazards Directive

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the European Commission proposal to amend Directive 96/82/EC on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances. [75391]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Seveso II Directive on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances aims to prevent major accidents and limit their consequences for human health and the environment. Pressure to amend the Directive follows a number of recent accidents involving dangerous substances.

The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee recommended that the UK's handling of two of the provisions within the European Commission proposal should be subject to a debate by European Standing Committee A. This was due to take place on 15 October, but has been postponed.

Political Agreement to a Council Common Position on the proposal will be reached at the Environment Council on 17 October.

Social Security Advisory Committee

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has for reviewing the Social Security Advisory Committee. [75390]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In line with normal practice for periodic review of non-departmental public bodies, I have asked that a review be conducted of the Social Security Advisory Committee which begins today. The review will look at the rationale for establishing the Committee, its past performance and its organisational structure. It will consider the role of the organisation in the future and may make recommendations for change.

I have appointed Professor Hazel Genn to act as independent reviewer. We will be taking views from interested parties through a consultation exercise. I am sure the review will produce interesting and helpful results.

State Retirement Pension

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will estimate the value of the basic state retirement pension if the retirement age were raised to *(a)* 70 years and *(b)* 75 years of age and if the pension tax credit were abolished in its first full year of implementation and the savings used to increase the basic state retirement pension; [71575]

(2) if he will estimate the value of the basic state retirement pension if Government spending on the basic state pension for 2002–03 were kept constant but the retirement age was raised to *(a)* 70 years and *(b)* 75 years of age; [71576]

(3) if he will estimate the saving in expenditure on the basic state retirement pension in 2002–03 if the retirement age were raised to *(a)* 70 and *(b)* 75 years of age. [71578]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 24 July 2002]:* Currently, State Pension Age is 60 for women and 65 for men, but this will be equalised at age 65 from 2020 with gradual introduction from 2010. It will not be possible to raise the State Pension Age further until 2020. Assuming the same phasing in period (ie ten years to raise the SPA by five years) then at 2030, if the State Pension Age was raised to 70, the Basic State Pension could be around £120 in today's prices. Similarly, if, by April 2040 the State Pension Age was 75, the Basic State Pension could be around £190 in today's prices.

The Government Actuary's Department estimate that if the state pension age were raised gradually from 65 in 2020 to 70 in 2030 around 1.9 million people who are alive today would reach age 65 in the future but would not be expected to reach the relevant revised state pension age.

If the state pension age were raised from 65 in 2020 to 70 in 2030 and to 75 in 2040 around 4.4 million people who are alive today would reach age 65 in the future but would not be expected to reach the relevant revised state pension age.

These figures assume that a change in the state pension age is fully phased in by 2030–40 and that all savings from not paying State Pension prior to these ages, including money allocated to the Pension Credit, are used to pay the Basic State Pension. In addition, these figures ignore the effects on other benefits.

Notes:
1 Figures are for 2020 in 2002 prices.
2 The calculations are based on the scenario 1 costs of the Pension Credit in 2020 set out in the DWP publication "The Pension Credit: Long-term projections".
3 Figures take account of current uprating policy.
4 Note 4 Source: 2000-based population projections for Great Britain.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many stakeholder pensions have now been taken out; and what their distribution is by convenient income bands of *(a)* the participant, *(b)* their spouse and *(c)* their parents. [74642]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer on 15 October 2002]:* Figures from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) show that up to the end of June 2002 1,011,934 stakeholder pension policies had been sold. A breakdown of distribution by income bands is not available. However figures published by the ABI in March 2002 show that in cases where earnings of policyholders are known to providers, then the majority of them (60 per cent.) have earnings of between £10,000 and £30,000 a year. Official figures from the Inland Revenue showing the earning bands of policyholders in the 2001–2002 tax year are expected to be available by the end of the current tax year.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 96W, on disability living allowance, how many applicants whose initial claim for disability living allowance was rejected in Portsmouth, South appealed against the rejection in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [73996]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applicants for disability living allowance were *(a)* granted, *(b)* unsuccessful, *(c)* granted on appeal and *(d)* granted on review in the Portsmouth, South constituency in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [73882]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available.

Ageing (Madrid Plan)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what steps he is taking to implement the recommendations of the Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002, adopted by EU ministers on 13 September; [74322]

(2) If he will publish an action plan to take forward the recommendations of the Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002, adopted by EU ministers on 13 September. [74323]

Mr. McCartney: The Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 was adopted by UNECE Ministers on 13 September. The Government believes that existing policies for older people will provide the basis for progress towards the ten priorities of the Regional Strategy.

The Strategy aims to support member states' response to the challenges and opportunities of population ageing, in order to achieve a society for all ages. It does not set mandatory requirements, nor does it require member states to produce action plans to take forward the recommendations. UNECE member states will determine follow up arrangements in line with decisions made by the Commission for Social Development of the UN.

New Deal 50-plus

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer on 17 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 97W, on the New Deal 50-plus programme, how far his Department has extended its use of the New Deal 50-plus programme to support its staff recruitment; and if he will make a statement. [74546]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In July 2002 the New Deal 50-plus programme was extended across the whole of the Department for Work and Pensions. Guidance was issued to encourage managers to employ participants from across the New Deal programmes including New Deal 50-plus.

Participants on New Deal 50-plus will receive training and support to help them compete effectively at Fair & Open competition to become a permanent employee. It is therefore hoped that many of our New Deal

employees (including those from the 50-plus category) will secure permanent employment with the Department.

By next summer we aim to recruit sufficient people across all our New Deal programmes to reflect the Department's proportionate share in the labour market. Data will be available on our progress towards this later this year.

HEALTH

Generic Medicine Prices

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the statutory maximum price scheme covering generic medicines supplied for use in the NHS in primary care. [74941]

Mr. Lammy: We are today announcing a review of the maximum price scheme. A copy of the consultation letter setting out the Government's proposals and timetable to roll the scheme forward, unchanged, has been placed in the Library.

Elective Hospital Spells

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the activity levels were in the quarter to *(a)* March 2000 and *(b)* March 2001 for (i) general and (ii) acute elective hospital spells. [61440]

Mr. Hutton: There is no distinction made between general and acute elective hospital spells. All elective spells are acute other than geriatric medicine. The figures requested are available on the Department's website at www.doh.gsi.gov.uk/hes.

Reservists

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact upon the NHS of the call-up of military reservists during the Gulf War; and how many *(a)* nurses, *(b)* GPs, *(c)* medical consultants and *(d)* other health care professionals were subject to call-up as reservists. [74648]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not made an assessment of the impact on the National Health Service of the call up of military reservists during the Gulf War, and did not collect information about the number of reservists who were subject to call up.

Delayed Discharge and Energy Readmission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level the fines for *(a)* social services and *(b)* NHS trusts will be for (i) emergency readmissions and (ii) delayed discharges; and if he will make a statement. [74535]

Jacqui Smith: The consultation on reimbursement for delayed discharge closed on the 18 September. In the consultation document it was suggested that the reimbursement for delayed discharge should be £120 per day in London and the South East and £100 throughout the rest of England. The consultation document also suggested that there should be no charge for emergency readmissions since these would be treated as part of the same episode of care under the new financial flows regime due to be implemented from 2004. If a National Health Service trust discharges a patient too early, they will face the risk that the patient will be readmitted, and the hospital will face the additional costs it incurs for this readmission.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the delays in Criminal Records Bureau checks on *(a)* social workers, *(b)* other social care staff and *(c)* voluntary health organisations working with children; and if he will make a statement. [74537]

Jacqui Smith: I am aware of the current delays in processing checks by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). The Department is working across government with the CRB to minimise the effect this has on workers in all sectors who require checks.

Ethical Foreign Nurse Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number and percentage of *(a)* recruitment agencies and *(b)* overseas nurses that are part of the ethical nurse recruitment code of practice. [74321]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has written to 92 agencies informing them that it is compiling a list of recruitment agencies. So far 30 recruitment agencies have been placed on this list who are complying with the code of practice.

All nurses from abroad should be recruited into the National Health Service in accordance with the code of practice.

Mental Health

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 148W, on mental health, if he will list the additional financial resources that are planned for the appointment of mental health workers for the next year; and if he will make a statement. [74712]

Jacqui Smith: Decisions on funding for mental health workers for next year will be made later in the Autumn as part of the work on primary care trusts allocations and central budgets.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many graduate primary care mental health workers trained in brief therapy techniques, as outlined in the NHS Plan have been employed in each of the last years; and if he will make a statement. [74541]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan set out that one thousand new graduate primary care mental health workers trained in brief therapy techniques of proven effectiveness will be employed by 2004 to help general practitioners manage and treat common mental health problems in all age groups, including children. Funds to support the appointment of 1000 such staff will be allocated in 2003–4. Central information on the number appointed is not yet available. This year, £2.5 million has been made available to establish new training

programmes to support the new workers when they are employed. This initiative is being led by Trent workforce development confederation and information about the process is due to be placed on the web site very shortly.

Care Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential child care staff were qualified at GNVQ level 3 by March; and how many still needed to be qualified to NVQ level 3 as per the requirement set out in The Government's Objectives for Children's Social Services. [74531]

Jacqui Smith: The application forms for the training support programme grant that local councils completed in April 2002 provide the following data about residential child care staff and national vocational qualifications (NVQs):

Number who have achieved their NVQ Level 3	2,020
Number who need to obtain their NVQ Level 3	7,592

However, the above figures do not include all the residential child care staff in the voluntary and private sectors as we do not collect data from these sectors.

The National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes includes a standard stating that "A minimum ratio of 80 per cent. of all care staff have completed their Level 3 in caring for children and young people NVQ by January 2005." This standard will be monitored by the National Care Standards Commission during their inspections of all children's homes.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees were working in *(a)* social services departments, *(b)* residential care, *(c)* domiciliary care and *(d)* intermediate care in each of the last five years. [74533]

Jacqui Smith: Data on the numbers of employees working on intermediate care services, and the numbers of staff working in the independent care sector are not available centrally. The whole-time equivalent numbers of staff employed by local authorities in social services departments, residential care services and domiciliary care services between 1997 and 2001 (the latest date for which data are available) are shown in the table.

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Year (as at 30 September)	*Social Services Departments*	*Residential Care*	*Domiciliary Services*
1997	229,400	65,400	53,600
1998	223,500	62,100	50,500
1999	221,700	59,200	47,200
2000	217,500	56,600	42,900
2001	212,000	53,800	40,200

Source:
Form SSDS001.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many statistical tables requested by hon. Members in parliamentary questions have been placed in the Library and not been published in the *Official Report* in the last five years. [74545]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The Department places in the Library any attachments to answers, such as statistical tables or published documents, whose excessive length or complicated format precludes their inclusion in the *Official Report*. This is standard practice across Government Departments. Such documents are also routinely made available on the Department's website wherever possible.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many CAMHS in-patient beds were provided in each year since 1997 *(a)* in total, *(b)* in England and *(c)* in each local authority; how many are planned to be provided in the next two years; and if he will make a satement. [74315]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally in the form requested. The table gives the average daily number of available beds in wards classified as children: mental illness, in National Health Service trusts in England for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01.

The provision of child and adolescent mental health in-patient facilities is being considered as part of the development of the new children's national service framework, on which work is proceeding. We will be increasing the number of secure adolescent mental health beds by 24 in a new unit in Birmingham by autumn 2003.

Average daily number of available beds in wards classified as children: mental illness, NHS trusts in England, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Year	*Mental Illness*
1996–97	538
1997–98	522
1998–99	538
1999–00(1)	482
2000–01	531

Note:
Beds in wards classified as children's mental illness do not cover all the child and adolescent mental health services provision available. Some facilities designed for older adolescents may be included in "other ages" mental illness.
Source:
Department of Health form KH03
(1) 1999–00 data were incomplete.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* amount and *(b)* proportion of mental health expenditure has been on child and adolescent services for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement on his assessment of the adequacy of this expenditure. [74316]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available for the last five years. However our estimate for the likely mental health expenditure in 2001–02 and the proportion spent on child and adolescent mental health services is shown in the table, with an estimate on the personal social services (PSS) expenditure.

We appreciate that child and adolescent mental health services still need to be developed further. The work being taken forward by the child and adolescent mental health external working group of the children's national service framework will do much to inform our future expenditure.

Estimated Mental Health Expenditure 2001/2 £ million (per cent.)

	CAMHS	*Adult MH*	*Elderly*	*Total*
HCHS	289	3171	194	3654
	(8%)	(87%)	(5%)	(100%)
PSS	269	678	376	1323
	(20%)	(51%)	(28%)	(100%)
Total	558	3849	570	4977
	(11%)	(77%)	(12%)	(100%)

Notes:

1. Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) costs exclude the costs of primary care and drugs.
2. Personal Social Services (PSS) costs include Children's Social Services (CSS) costs where appropriate.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 15 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 129W, on CAMHS innovation projects, what the publication date is for the overview report of the CAMHS innovation plan; and if he will make a statement on its launch at the national conference. [74610]

Jacqui Smith: The report will be published on 4 December, the day of the National Conference.

Older People's Taskforce

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* former members of and *(b)* new appointees to the Older People's Taskforce; and if he will make a statement. [74317]

Jacqui Smith: The former members of the older people's taskforce are:

Mr. Harry Cayton, chief executive Alzheimers Society

Dr. Peter Melton, general practitioner, Lincolnshire

Mr. David Panter, then Chief Executive Hillingdon Primary Care Trust

Mr. Chai Patel, Westminster Healthcare

Mrs. Beth Taylor, pharmacy manager, South London Community National Health Service Trust

Mr. David White, then chief executive Suffolk Health Authority

The new appointees to the older people's taskforce are:

Ms Wendy Harris, pharmacist

Mr. Stan Davidson/Mrs. Jean Wormwell (alternates), Older People's Reference Group

Mr. Richard Humphries, director, Health and Social Care Change Agents team

Ms Diana Whitworth, chief executive, Carers UK

The older people's taskforce plays an important role advising the Department on the implementation of policy for older people's services across the NHS and social care.

Health and Social Workers (Overseas Recruitment)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place to ensure that overseas-recruited *(a)* health workers and *(b)* social workers who are working with children have not been convicted of an offence that relates to crimes against children. [74316]

Jacqui Smith: Health Service Circular HSC 2002/008, *Pre and Post Appointment Checks for All Persons Working in the NHS in England*, instructs National Health Service bodies through the Secretary of State's power of direction to carry out a comprehensive range of pre and post appointment checks before appointments are confirmed. This includes the appointment of staff recruited from overseas. Where the post involves care of children within the terms of the Protection of Children Act, employers must check the Protection of Children Act List before making the appointment. In addition, before taking up such a post, applicants must inform the appointing NHS body if they have been convicted or charged with a criminal offence in the United Kingdom or in any other country. Failure to do so may be a dismissible offence.

The Criminal Records Bureau will soon be launching an advisory service to employers about the availability of criminal record checks in a variety of countries.

Equally it is the duty of individual social care employers to carry out necessary checks to ensure that employees recruited from oversees are fit to practice.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue a code of practice for social services departments recruiting social workers from other countries; and if he will make a statement. [74532]

Jacqui Smith: There are no current plans to issue a special code of practice covering recruitment from other countries. The onus is on the employer to ensure that all recruits meet appropriate standards, wherever they originate from.

At present the general social care council offers an "international recognition service" which can provide advice to employers on the status and standing of qualifications gained in other countries, for example that a certificate is or is not a professional qualification in social work in its country of origin. It is then for the employers to complete the usual recruitment checks verifying the information given by the applicant.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the conclusions of his assessment of the performance of the Director for International Recruitment in the year 2001–02. [71733]

Mr. Hutton *[holding reply issued on 22 July 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, vol. 389, column 875W

Hospitals (Smoking Ban)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a ban on smoking in hospitals and in hospital grounds. [71683]

Ms Blears: Many National Health Service trusts have already banned smoking in their hospitals and hospital grounds and the government have set milestones for

implementing smoking policies across the NHS as part of the national service framework on coronary heart disease.

The government is currently considering a comprehensive survey to provide a clear and up to date picture of the current situation across the NHS and to assist in determining what further action should be taken.

Any decisions on further action will need to be taken against the background that the purchase and smoking of cigarettes is not illegal in this country.

TRANSPORT

Lighthouses

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport into which of the north/south implementation bodies established as part of the British–Irish Agreement the Commissioners for Irish Lights has been incorporated. [73396]

Mr. Jamieson: The Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of Ireland establishing Implementation Bodies of 8 March 1999, provides that one of the North/South Implementation Bodies, the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, will exercise the existing functions of the Commissioners of Irish Lights in respect of providing and maintaining aids to navigation along the coast of the whole of the island of Ireland and its adjacent seas and islands. The Agreement provides that the legislation required to transfer those functions to the Body will be brought forward as soon as possible.

However, following consideration of the matter by a working group of officials from my Department, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and relevant Irish Government Departments, it has become apparent that complex issues surround such a transfer. The North/South Ministerial Council has asked the relevant Ministers and Departments in the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government to examine the alternative possibilities and bring back proposals to the Council.

Cliffe Airport

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the number of additional houses that would be needed if the Cliffe airport option is adopted as *(a)* two runways and *(b)* four runways. [74066]

Mr. Jamieson: Our analysis suggests that with forecast housing growth, relatively high rates of unemployment, in and out commuting from the relevant catchment areas, the airport's employment needs could be met with fairly limited additional housing development.

A more detailed assessment of the housing implications (including an assessment for 2015—at which stage only two of the four runways are assumed to be in place) is set out in the *SERAS Land Use and Urbanisation study* (section A7). Copies of all the above reports are available in the House libraries.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Homelessness

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what targets he has set for decent housing and reducing homelessness. [71955]

The Deputy Prime Minister: As a result of the 2002 Spending Review, we have a Public Service Agreement target to bring all social housing into decent condition by 2010, and to increase the proportion of private housing occupied by vulnerable groups that meets the decent homes standard.

We are working with local authorities to ensure that by March 2004, no homeless family with children is housed in B&B accommodation other than in an emergency.

Rural Communities

Mr. Todd: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what planning guidance is given to local authorities to permit the maintenance and development of small rural communities. [71956]

Mr. McNulty: National Planning Policy Guidance encourages local planning authorities to promote healthy, viable rural communities and advises that most new development in rural areas should be focused on accessible local service centres, which may include a group of small villages.

European Structural Funds

Helen Jackson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proposals he has to ensure the efficient delivery of Objective One European programmes to support local economies. [71957]

Mr. McNulty: Structural Fund programmes are delivered through formal Managing Authorities working directly with local partnerships. In England the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is the Managing Authority for all Objective 1 and Objective 2 programmes but devolves implementation to the Government Offices (GOs).

Officials provide policy guidance and advice in order to aid effective delivery of the financial and physical programme targets.

Programmes are frequently evaluated and best practice arrangements are in place and extend beyond Objective 1.

Regional Government

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has had in response to the Government's White Paper on Regional Government, Your Region: Your Choice. [71958]

Mr. Raynsford: To date, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received around 1,100 representations on the White Paper, of which around 200 commented on stakeholder involvement with elected regional assemblies.

In addition, we have received around 1,500 postcards as a result of a campaign organised by the Cornish Constitutional Convention, which seeks a referendum on establishing a Cornish Assembly.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Regional Government White Paper. [71975]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice* takes forward our Manifesto commitment to allow the English regions the opportunity to choose whether to establish an elected assembly. We intend to introduce a Bill to provide for regional referendums and associated local government reviews as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Housing

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to tackle housing abandonment in the North West. [71959]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am determined to help areas where the housing market has collapsed. That is why this Government has established nine Pathfinder projects dedicated to providing lasting solutions for communities blighted by abandoned homes. Four are located in the North West.

Mr. Hugh Robertson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his plans for new housing in Kent. [71960]

Mr. McNulty: It is the responsibility of Kent County Council to decide on housing provision in line with Regional Planning Guidance for the South East issued in March 2001.

The review of the allocation of housing in the South East, which in the first instance is a matter for the South East England Regional Assembly, will be progressed through the next review of the Regional Planning Guidance.

John Mann: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for tackling slum housing in coalfield communities. [71961]

The Deputy Prime Minister: We are determined to tackle housing market failure wherever it occurs. Low demand Pathfinder projects will provide lasting solutions for communities blighted by derelict homes through investment and innovation. Three of the recently announced Pathfinders include coalfield communities. More generally, Local Authorities have a vital role in producing comprehensive housing strategies together with action plans to tackle the problems identified.

Mr. Lamb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. [71962]

Laurie Quinn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the provision of social housing in rural areas. [71976]

Mr. McNulty: We recognise the importance of affordable housing in sustaining inclusive and thriving rural communities. We have taken substantial measures to help alleviate housing pressures, as outlined in the Rural White Paper. We expect to deliver around 9,000 affordable homes annually in rural areas by 2003–04, including 3,000 in small rural settlements.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will make a statement on his housing policy in the South East. [71965]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Policy on housing in the South East, is set out in Regional Planning Guidance for the South East, which was issued in March 2001.

I made a statement in July 2002, which covered housing, including London and the South East, and I stated that I would return to the House by the end of the year with a comprehensive long term programme of action.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many *(a)* detatched houses, *(b)* semi-detatched houses, *(c)* terraced houses, *(d)* maisonettes and *(e)* flats have been sold by local authorities in London under the right-to-buy scheme since 1980; [74266]

(2) how many council properties with *(a)* one bedroom, *(b)* two bedrooms, *(c)* three bedrooms, *(d)* four bedrooms and *(e)* five bedrooms or more have been sold by local authorities in London under the Right-to-Buy Scheme since 1980. [74265]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The precise information requested is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Summary information reported by local authorities only distinguishes sales of houses (including bungalows) from flats (including maisonettes). By the end of March 2002, it is estimated slightly more than 246,000 homes had been sold by London boroughs under the RTB scheme, consisting of some 121,500 houses, and 124,500 flats.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he intends to take to bring empty private sector houses back into use. [71969]

The Deputy Prime Minister: We will shortly publish comprehensive guidance on unlocking the potential of empty properties; we intend to give local authorities powers to end the council tax discount on long-term empty homes; we are giving local authorities a range of new freedoms to assist private housing in poor condition; and we are targeting a package of measures on nine areas of low demand where the problem of abandonment is most acute. In addition, we are considering a range of measures recommended by the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee in its recent report on empty homes.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on responses to the consultation on reform of the standard spending assessment. [71963]

Mr. Leslie: The formal consultation on options for the Formula Grant distribution system closed on the 30 September. We will consider the evidence, the pressures and the points made before we take decisions. Those decisions will be announced in the 2003/04 provisional settlement in due course.

Urban Land

Paul Flynn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what change has taken place since 1997 in the percentage of land in England that is used for urban purposes. [71966]

Mr. McNulty: In 1997 and 1998 land classified as urban increased by around 5,600 hectares a year, which is less than 0.5 per cent. of the land used for urban purposes and about 0.04 per cent. of England. The information is drawn from the Department's Land Use Change Statistics which in rural areas have a 5-year revision cycle so a complete picture is not available for more recent years.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Amess: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent representations he has received on planning applications for mobile phone masts. [71968]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received a wide range of representations on planning applications for telecommunications masts over the last year.

North–West Regional Assembly

Mr. Osborne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost of establishing an elected regional assembly in the North West. [71970]

Mr. Raynsford: Costs will vary from region to region, mainly because of the different sizes of their electorates. But we expect them all to fall in a range around £15–30m a region. This estimate includes all costs necessary to establish an assembly, including the cost of a referendum and of the first elections to an assembly.

Local Government

Mr. Casale: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on comprehensive performance assessments for local authorities. [71971]

Mr. Leslie: The Local Government White Paper, *Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services*, published in December 2001, introduced a requirement for local authorities to be assessed and categorised on the basis of a comprehensive appraisal of their performance. This Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is intended to cover performance across an authority's full range of service areas. The Audit Commission is tasked with taking the lead in co-ordinating and delivering the new assessment process.

Planning

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his proposals to reform the planning procedures for major infrastructure projects. [71972]

Mr. McNulty: We are considering the options for taking this forward. As indicated by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in his statement on 18 July we have accepted the Select Committee's arguments that Parliamentary Procedures for major infrastructure projects are not the best way forward.

Park Homes

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he plans to take in response to the Park Homes Working Party Report. [71974]

Mr. McNulty: We are already acting on those recommendations not requiring legislation, and will shortly publish research into the economics of park homes. We are developing other measures that require legislation, and will consult on these as soon as practicable.

Rental Homes

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, how many affordable rental homes will be built by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* registered social landlords in the current year. [71977]

Mr. McNulty: Central government does not make forecasts of affordable housing build. We expect local authorities to plan to meet the housing requirements of the whole community, including those in need of affordable housing.

However, from information available through the Housing Corporation's monitoring of its Approved Development Programme (ADP) and support via Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG), it is broadly estimated that RSLs will be complete between 16,000 and 17,000 new homes by for rent (excluding shared ownership) during 2002–03.

RSLs remain the principal providers of new social housing. Local authorities build very few new dwellings, generally only in special circumstances.

County Councillors

Ms Merron: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he has taken to support improvements in standards of conduct of members of county councils. [71967]

Mr. Raynsford: From May this year, a new Code of Conduct has been applied to all councillors—including members of county councils. The new Code makes very clear the high standards of behaviour that are expected of all councillors. Alongside the introduction of new Codes, the Government has established the Standards Board for England to support councils in raising standards of conduct, and to investigate allegations of misconduct.

Huntingdonshire District Council

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate for Huntingdonshire District Council the effects of each of the options set out in chapter 9 of Formula Grant Distribution: A Consultation Paper. [74228]

Mr. Raynsford: The effects on Huntingdonshire DC of the options in chapter 9 (which relate to the Area Cost Adjustment) are set out on page 118 of the consultation document. They are as follows, showing in each case the increase both in actual and percentage terms compared with 2002/03.

Local Authority	2002/03 Total SSA	Change from 2002/03 Total SSA									
		Option ACA1		Option ACA2		Option ACA3		Option ACA4		Option ACA5	
	(£m)	(£m)	(%)	(£m)	(%)	(£m)	(%)	(£m)	(%)	(£m)	(%)
Huntingdonshire	14.0	0.3	2.4%	0.3	2.1%	0.4	3.0%	0.6	4.4%	0.7	5.1%

Local Government Staff

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action he will take to improve the salary and conditions of service of local government staff; and if he will make a statement. [71948]

Mr. Raynsford: Negotiations on local government pay and conditions of service are carried out by local authorities and the trade unions.

Area-Based Initiatives

Claire Ward: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Review of Area Based Initiatives. [74805]

Mrs. Roche: I am announcing the outcome of the Review of Area Based Initiatives today. The Review sets out a number of important changes which will significantly improve the co-ordination of area based initiatives. I am placing copies of the report on the outcomes in the libraries of both Houses.

Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

David Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to publish the Government's consultation document on a national alcohol harm reduction strategy. [75042]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply. It has always been the Government's intention to undertake an extensive process of consultation with stakeholders and relevant groups as part of the development of a National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy. Yesterday jointly with my hon. Friend Hazel Blears we published a consultation document "National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy: Consultation Document" setting out the areas on which the Government would welcome views. Copies of this have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The consultation period will run until 15 January and responses are sought directly to the Strategy Unit and Department of Health. We will also be holding a series of joint consultation events to seek the views of a range of stakeholders including local authorities, police, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), NHS/ medical services (eg PCTs), education (schools sector), academics (university sector), voluntary sector, non-government organisations, the alcohol industry, users of treatment services and employers. Once the consultation period has closed the Strategy Unit will produce an interim analysis taking account of responses received.

TREASURY

Excess Winter Deaths

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many excess winter deaths occurred in 2001–02, broken down by *(a)* English region, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Great Britain by age band; and if he will provide corresponding estimates for each of the last five years. [74536]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to Mr. Burstow from Len Cook dated 16 Oct 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking for the excess winter deaths for each English region, Scotland, Wales and Great Britain, in each year 1996–1997 to 2001–2002, with a breakdown by age for each year. (74536)

Figures for English Government Office Regions and for Wales for 1996–97 to 2000–01 are provided in the attached table. Please note that the figures for 2000–01 are currently provisional. Comparable figures for Scotland are not produced routinely. Available figures were published in a GRO Scotland occasional paper in April 2002.[1]

ONS will be releasing final figures for 2000–2001 and provisional excess winter mortality figures for 2001–2002 on 24 October 2002. I will be placing a copy in the Libraries of the House at that time.

Notes:

1 Bowie, N., Jackson, G., 2002. Occasional Paper No.7: The Raised Incidence of Winter Deaths. General Register Office for Scotland

Excess winter deaths by age-group and Government Office Region of usual residence, 1991/1992–1999/2000 and 2000/2001***

		1996/1997[1]	1997/1998[1]	1998/1999[1]	1999/2000[1]	2000/2001[2]
England, Wales and elsewhere	0–64	3040	1700	3100	3770	2300
	65–74	6970	4200	6950	7440	3300
	75–84	17540	7870	16340	16840	8400
	85+	20140	9130	20450	20390	11000
	All ages	47690	22900	46840	48440	25000
North East	0–64	130	110	90	280	100
	65–74	500	360	470	480	300
	75–84	920	530	890	1030	600
	85+	680	550	920	880	500
	All ages	2230	1550	2370	2680	1500

Excess winter deaths by age-group and Government Office Region of usual residence, 1991/1992–1999/2000 and 2000/2001***

		1996/1997[1]	1997/1998[1]	1998/1999[1]	1999/2000[1]	2000/2001[2]
North West	0–64	510	280	630	420	200
	65–74	1070	500	1230	1090	600
	75–84	2260	980	2600	2060	1300
	85+	2520	1010	2880	2520	1600
	All ages	6360	2770	7350	6090	3800
Yorkshire and the Humber	0–64	240	210	260	350	200
	65–74	700	480	810	680	500
	75–84	1810	860	1800	1690	800
	85+	1800	910	1890	1900	1000
	All ages	4540	2460	4760	4620	2600
East Midlands	0–64	250	130	310	350	200
	65–74	470	360	550	590	300
	75–84	1280	700	1560	1270	800
	85+	1540	820	1680	1620	1000
	All ages	3540	2000	4090	3820	2200
West Midlands	0–64	410	250	470	440	300
	65–74	740	510	750	950	400
	75–84	1650	800	1730	1810	1000
	85+	1740	900	1920	2090	900
	All ages	4530	2460	4860	5290	2600
East	0–64	240	170	130	330	100
	65–74	710	410	640	670	200
	75–84	1720	930	1590	1800	1000
	85+	2320	1030	2440	2070	1200
	All ages	5000	2540	4800	4880	2400
London	0–64	430	150	420	470	300
	65–74	870	320	670	930	300
	75–84	2240	930	1690	2050	800
	85+	2390	1120	2160	2430	1400
	All ages	5940	2520	4940	5870	2800
South East	0–64	420	250	370	630	300
	65–74	870	570	890	1050	200
	75–84	2770	990	2190	2470	1000
	85+	3600	1410	3260	3530	1600
	All ages	7650	3210	6710	7680	3200
South West	0–64	300	120	230	310	300
	65–74	600	400	420	620	200
	75–84	1830	700	1380	1580	500
	85+	2320	1020	2100	2220	1200
	All ages	5060	2240	4130	4730	2300
Wales	0–64	120	90	230	220	200
	65–74	490	360	540	420	200
	75–84	1050	480	930	1090	600
	85+	1220	350	1200	1150	600
	All ages	2880	1290	2900	2880	1700
England	0–64	2930	1660	2900	3570	2100
	65–74	6520	3890	6430	7070	3100
	75–84	16490	7410	15430	15770	7800
	85+	18910	8770	19250	19250	10400
	All ages	44850	21740	44010	45650	23400
England and Wales	0–64	3050	1760	3130	3790	2300
	65–74	7010	4260	6970	7490	3300
	75–84	17540	7890	16360	16850	8400
	85+	20130	9120	20450	20400	11000
	All ages	47730	23030	46900	48520	25000

Notes:
* Excess winter deaths are defined by the Office for National Statistics as the difference between the number of deaths during the four winter months (December to March) and the average number of deaths during the preceding autumn (August to November) and the following summer (April to July)
** provisional
[1] rounded to the nearest 10
[2] provisional, rounded to the nearest 100

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the rules are regarding obtaining work without the possession of a national insurance number. [72126]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply. Employers can offer employment to a person who has not yet registered for National Insurance purposes. A person without a National Insurance number is not precluded from starting work and then obtaining a National Insurance number later.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employers were prosecuted for employing people without national insurance numbers in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001; and what penalties were imposed. [72125]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply. There is no requirement in law to have a National Insurance number before starting work. Therefore no employers have been prosecuted for employing people without National Insurance numbers.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many National Insurance number applicants have waited four months or more for an interview in each of the last 24 months; and what has been the average time between a person's original application for a number and a number being issued in each year since 1992. [74708]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply. The information is not available in the format requested.

Earlier this year, applicants were experiencing delays in some parts of the country for up to 6 months. That figure has reduced considerably, and indications are that no one currently has to wait more than 4 weeks for an initial National Insurance number allocation interview.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Solicitor General how many net additional staff her Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52427]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The figures for the Departments for which the Attorney General is responsible are as follows:

Serious Fraud Office

Record keeping by the SFO does not allow the breakdown of the creation of new posts on a month by month basis without incurring disproportionate costs. However, during the year 1 April 2001 to 1 April 2002, the SFO created 24 additional executive officer posts and 18 additional administrative officer posts.

HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate

In the period June 2001 to April 2002, HMCPSI created three additional posts, two at executive officer level and one at administrative officer level.

Treasury Solicitor's Department

In relation to the Treasury Solicitor's Department (including Legal Secretariat to the Law officers), no additional posts were created in the period June 2001 to Apri 2002.

Crown Prosecution Service

The number of net additional staff recruited since June 2001 by the Crown Prosecution Service is set out in the attached table. The figures are Full Time equivalent figures, reflecting the fact that some posts are part-time.

FTE Count	*June 01*	*July 01*	*Aug 01*	*Sept 01*	*Oct 01*	*Nov 01*	*Dec 01*	*Jan 02*	*Feb 02*	Mar 02	Total
Casual											
Administrative	41.89	50.57	−26.19	−53.25	−0.84	6.70	−2.93	4.89	1.48	3.73	26.04
Executive	−1.00	−1.00	0.00	−1.59	0.00	−1.00	0.00	0.67	−0.61	1.00	−3.54
Total change +/−	40.89	49.57	−26.19	−54.85	−0.84	5.70	−2.93	5.56	0.87	4.73	22.50
Permanent											
Administrative	59.85	78.97	45.16	25.10	38.88	27.26	10.03	24.43	16.77	−11.78	314.67
Executive	4.00	1.39	6.14	10.55	25.99	15.66	−.53	0.92	−2.06	−15.60	45.47
Total change +/−	63.85	80.37	51.30	35.66	64.88	42.92	8.50	25.35	14.71	−27.38	360.14

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 17 October 2002

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Medicines

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 15 September, when she will publish the results of the Working Group on Access to Medicines for the Poor. [74447]

Clare Short: The High Level Working Group on Access to Medicines brought together Government, foundations, international organisations and the pharmaceutical industry. These stakeholders worked together on the Report to the Prime Minister which will be published shortly.

TRANSPORT

Road Improvements

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the timetable for each stage until the opening of the A303 (T) Stonehenge improvement scheme, with specific reference to the *(a)* Countess Road flyover and *(b)* Chicklade bypass; and if he will make a statement. [72616]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* The proposed timetable for the A303 (T) Stonehenge Improvement scheme is—

publication of draft orders	early 2003
public inquiry	late autumn 2003
decision	2004
start of works (subject to the above)	2005
completion	2008

The construction of a flyover at Countess roundabout is part of this scheme and, subject to the completion of statutory procedures, is expected to open in Summer 2006.

The A303 Chicklade Bottom—Mere Improvement is one of the schemes that were remitted to the London to South West and South Wales Multi-Modal Study (SWARMMS). The study recommended that this improvement should be taken forward to provide, with other improvements to the A303, an improved strategic route into the south west of England, and is supported by the South West Regional Assembly. The representations received on the study are being reviewed and an announcement will be made in due course.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent airports have powers to restrict aircraft use by reference to engine noise levels. [74827]

Mr. Jamieson: Restrictions on aircraft use by reference to engine noise levels must be compatible with the recommended standards and resolutions of the International Civil Aviation Organisation, and with the relevant directives and regulations of the European Union, in particular Directive 2002/30/EC on rules and procedures relating to operating restrictions at airports. Subject to these constraints, and to the airport's licence conditions, an airport may restrict the access of aircraft on noise grounds, either absolutely or subject to conditions, provided it does so in a non-discriminatory fashion.

Multi-Modal Studies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Government's Code of Practice on Written Consultation applies to multi-modal studies; and if he will make a statement. [75604]

Mr. Jamieson: In certain circumstances Ministers can decide to depart from elements of the Code of Practice on Written Consultation issued by the Cabinet Office in December 2000. We decided in October 2001 that the Multi-Modal Studies should not be bound by the Code's requirement for a 12-week consultation period for their consultation exercises.

The main reason for departing from the Code is that consultation is not a one-off exercise but an integral part of the Study process. Key stakeholders and the wider public are consulted at various stages during a Study. In addition to specific consultation events, members of the public and key partners are kept informed of progress through tailor made leaflets and newsletters. Most Studies have also established specific websites or have a page within the Government Office website where key documents are posted.

Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he plans to propose a Harbour Revision Order to reconstitute the Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority; and if he will make a statement. [74549]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received an application from the Authority itself for a Harbour Revision Order to reconstitute the Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority. This Order was formally advertised (in accordance with Schedule 3 of the Harbours Act 1964) in May and June of this year. No formal objections were received during the 42 day period for such objections to be made and we hope to be in a position to make this Order in the near future.

Zero Sulphur Fuels

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are in place to ensure zero sulphur fuels are available within the UK. [72378]

Mr. Jamieson: A new European Directive is in the closing stages of agreement that will, subject to final negotiation between the Member States and the European Parliament, require sulphur-free petrol and diesel to be widely available from 1 January 2005, with all petrol and diesel sold for road-use being sulphur-free from 1 January 2009. This Directive is expected to be adopted in the coming months.

Two recent initiatives will ensure sulphur free petrol and diesel fuel is increasingly available in the UK over the next few years.

In his last Budget statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced plans to introduce duty incentives favouring sulphur free fuels in 2003, subject to agreement with the European Commission. This announcement was aimed at providing the oil industry with early notification so that they could plan their investment in the necessary refining technology accordingly.

DEFENCE

Terrorism

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether members of the reserve forces will continue to support operations as part of the campaign against international terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [76115]

Dr. Moonie: With the expiry of the call-out order made last October, a new order has been made to enable reservists to continue to be called out into service to support military operations in Afghanistan and related operations arising as part of the campaign against international terrorism. The new order is effective until 30 September 2003. Over 500 reservists were called out under the order made last October, of whom over half were called out compulsorily. The reservists are providing an invaluable contribution to the operations and we are most grateful for their continuing commitment and their employers' support.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Beryllium

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the agreements and protocols banning the sale of Beryllium to which the United Kingdom is a signatory. [74390]

Nigel Griffiths: The United Kingdom is not a signatory to any agreements or protocols banning the sale of Beryllium.

British Energy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when she expects to present her proposals for the restructuring of British Energy to the European Commission; [74379]

(2) When she expects to receive the plans for the restructuring of British Energy required under European Union rules governing state aids. [74380]

Ms Hewitt: The Community Guidelines on state aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty require proof of the repayment of the loan, or termination of the loan guarantee, or the submission of a restructuring or liquidation plan to the Commission within six months of authorisation of the rescue aid measure, subject to extension by the Commission. The UK has indicated to the Commission that it will communicate with it within the timescales required by the Guidelines.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's policy towards the sale of British Energy's North American assets. [74375]

Ms Hewitt: No decisions have been taken and no commitments given on British Energy's long term future at this time.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the overseas visits made by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in her Department since June 2001, stating for each the (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [74591]

Ms Hewitt: I have placed in the Libraries of the House details of overseas visits that DTI Ministers have undertaken since June 2001.

The costs of these overseas visits, attributable to the Ministerial budgets, during this period are as follows:

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry	£68,508
Minister of State for Energy & Construction	£174,466
Minister of State for E Commerce and Competitiveness	£56,598
Minister of State for Employment Relations Industry & the Regions	£37,829
Minister of State for Trade*	£68,854
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Competition, Consumers and Markets	£11,238
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Small Business and Export Control	£40,775
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Science and Innovation	£46,781

Note:
* These charges are shared with the FCO.

Details of overseas travel undertaken by officials are not held centrally and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Consultation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since 1997, indicating for each consultation *(a)* if copies were available online, *(b)* if copies were available in print, *(c)* the date the time period given for responses opened and *(d)* the date the time period given for responses closed. [69796]

Ms Hewitt: Records relating to consultation documents issued before the introduction of the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations on 1 January 2001 are not held centrally. All consultation documents published after 1 January 2001 are available in printed form and are published on the Department's website.

The list of consultations undertaken by the Department since 1 January 2001, and the dates they were opened and closed, are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Correspondence

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to respond to the letter of 10 July from the hon. Member for Nottingham, North about Mrs. M. Lynch. [74868]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have answered today.

BNFL

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what policy applies to the provision of *(a)* entertainment and *(b)* gifts to (i) staff, (ii) ministers and officials and (iii) others by BNFL and its subsidiaries. [73945]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* BNFL's policies on the provision of entertainment and gifts are a matter for the company.

Ministers and officials if receiving entertainment or gifts from BNFL, or any other company, must maintain standards of propriety in accordance with DTI and Cabinet Office guidance.

Fuel Stocks

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has held in the last three months with *(a)* the oil industry, *(b)* the road haulage industry, *(c)* UK emergency services and *(d)* representatives of business organisations about the secure supply of fuels in the event of an oil price spike consequent upon a conflict in Iraq; and if she will make a statement. [74440]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* The Department maintains an ongoing dialogue with the oil industry and other Government Departments who have primary responsibility for the road haulage industry and the UK emergency services. There are agreed procedures in place in case of possible disruption of fuel supplies. We stand ready to discuss issues of the security of oil supplies with other business organisations, should they wish to do so. We shall continue to keep the situation under review.

Fireworks

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement concerning fireworks. [76117]

Miss Melanie Johnson: On 15 October I announced tough new measures to cut the number of firework injuries. The new measures, which will also cut down on the problems of noise and nuisance, include:

proposed new regulations banning air bombs;

a crackdown on illegal markets in fireworks with improved co-ordination of intelligence between Customs and Excise, Health and Safety Executive and Trading Standards Departments; and

a new drive to encourage local councils to use their powers to curb the problem of noise and nuisance caused by fireworks.

Also:

Home Office are piloting fixed penalty notices of £40 in four areas for over 18s caught throwing fireworks in the street.

The announcement coincides with the launch of a new hard-hitting national safety campaign including posters and TV to highlight the injuries teenagers have suffered from fireworks misuse.

European Directives

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the EU directive introduced on reducing further emissions of gases from coal and oil-fired power stations and the implications for electricity prices. [72349]

Mr. Wilson: Among its provisions, EC Directive 2001/80/EC, otherwise known as the Large Combustion Plant Directive (LCPD), requires that so called "existing plants" (defined as those for which the original construction or operating licence was granted prior to 1 July 1987) comply with emission limit values (ELVs) for sulphur dioxide (SO_2), nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and dust, by 1 January 2008. Such limits apply to all large combustion plants with a rated thermal input of 50MW or above, not just to power stations.

As an alternative to meeting ELVs, existing plants may be subject to a National Plan. Such a plan would reduce the total annual emissions of these pollutants to the levels that would have been achieved by applying the ELVs referred to above to the existing plants in operation in the year 2000, on the basis of each plant's operational performance averaged over the last five years of operation up to and including 2000.

The LCPD leaves it open to Member States to decide whether, instead of pursuing the specified ELV approach, to develop a National Plan approach, which could offer some additional flexibility, while meeting the broad aims of the Directive.

Existing plants may, however, as a derogation from the LCPD, opt to operate for a maximum of 20,000 hours between 1 January 2008 and 31 December 2015 during which time they may operate with less stringent emission limits. At the end of this period, existing plants opting to operate under the 20,000 hour derogation must close.

We do not yet know which approach to implementing the LCPD would best suit the UK's needs. Such a decision will need to take account of the costs and benefits of each approach, as well as the UK's energy policy objectives. There will be consultations before a decision is taken.

The implications for electricity prices will not be clearer until consultation and appropriate analysis of future options has been completed.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EU Committee on Electronic Signatures is next due to meet; whether representatives of the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [68549]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee last met on 8 July 2002 and there are no further plans to meet. The UK is normally represented by an official from the Department of Trade and Industry. The DTI delegates at this committee represent all of the UK.

The Scottish Executive is regularly consulted on, and is fully involved in discussions, at official and Minister level, with the Department on the formulation of EU policy which touch on matters which fall within the responsibilities of the Scottish Executive.

Wind Farms

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if a comprehensive UK-wide assessment has been carried out to identify brownfield sites with sufficiently consistent wind speeds suitable for wind farms. [74514]

Mr. Wilson: The Government strongly supports the setting up of wind farms on brownfield sites. It is encouraging that a number of projects of this kind are coming forward. We are preparing a UK Wind Speed Database, to be made available on the DTI website, to help developers identify areas of potential opportunity.

Unsolicited Mail

Candy Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what information she has collated regarding the effect of the Data Protection Act 1998 on the dissemination of personal details for the distribution of unsolicited mail; [75152]

(2) if she has plans to make the dissemination of personal details for the distribution of junk mail dependent upon specific permission of an individual. [75153]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Mailing Preference Service operated by the Direct Marketing Association helps reduce the amount of unsolicited mail received by individuals who register with the service.

Under the Data Protection Act 1988, if personal data is being disclosed to a third party for marketing purposes, an individual has the opportunity to opt out. Responsibility for administering and enforcing the Act lies with the Information Commissioner, who is independent of Government.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by his Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within his Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [74686]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Wishart) on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1177W, and to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 999W.

In the financial years 2001–2002 and 2002 to date, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has paid a total of £883,027 to two public relations firms for the "Know Before You Go" public awareness campaign. This sum includes design and implementation of the campaign together with management fees. The two firms are: AEA Technology Environment and Biss Lancaster Euro RSCG.

We have also spent a total of £14,687 on consultancy advice and focus groups related to UK public attitudes towards the European Union. The firms involved were LA Associates/Peter Kellner and ICM Research.

Providing information on external consultancies other than public relations/communications firms would incur disproportionate costs.

Indonesia

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's travel advice on Indonesia. [76174]

Mr. Straw: On the night of Saturday 12 October, as soon as we heard of the atrocity in Bali, we recommended against all travel to Bali and all but essential travel to elsewhere in Indonesia.

In the light of further information and consideration, I have now agreed that we should advise against all travel to Indonesia and recommend that all British citizens should consider leaving Indonesia if their presence is not essential.

I have also authorised the withdrawal of some dependants and non-essential staff from the British Embassy in Jakarta.

British citizens who remain should exercise extreme caution especially in public places, including clubs, restaurants, bars, schools, places of worship, outdoor recreational venues and other locations frequented by foreigners.

Baroness Amos, Foreign Office Minister responsible for consular issues, will arrive in Bali this evening, where she will meet with British nationals, their families and friends caught up in this terrible incident. She will also be talking to senior members of the Indonesian Government in Jakarta on Saturday both to discuss the operation in Bali and how to strengthen our co-operation against international terrorism.

We have a 24 hour operation on the ground in Bali, made up of consular officers, police officers trained in family liaison, and volunteers. We will be reinforcing this team further.

We are also revising our travel advice for a range of other South East Asian countries to highlight the need for vigilance given the ongoing risk of terrorist activity.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Alcohol and Tobacco

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the rules are governing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco *(a)* on Court Service premises, *(b)* in administration areas and *(c)* by staff on duty outside Court Service premises. [74161]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Staff are expected to use their judgement about alcohol consumption. Any member of staff unfit for work due to the consumption of alcohol could be subject to disciplinary action and dismissed. Members of the public will not be admitted onto court premises whilst significantly under the influence of alcohol, and are forbidden from bringing alcohol onto court premises.

The smoking policy guidelines aim to provide smoke-free working conditions for those staff who want them, while offering limited facilities for smokers, and help for those who wish to stop smoking. Local arrangements may differ, but in general, those offices and courts with a smoking policy will enforce "no smoking" in staff corridors, toilets, lifts and other common areas, and at meetings and seminars. Before local arrangements are introduced the views of smokers and non-smokers are sought and any differences resolved by agreement. Overall consideration has to be given to the wishes of non-smokers.

Income Tax

Andy Burnham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the Lord Chancellor's proposals are for the amalgamation of divisions of the General Commissioners of Income Tax in Cleveland and North Yorkshire. [76118]

Ms Rosie Winterton: On 1 October 2002 an Order the Lord Chancellor made came into force, under Section 2(6) of the Taxes Management Act 1970, amalgamating Divisions in both North Yorkshire and Cleveland as follows. The Hartlepool and Stockton Divisions shall be merged into one new Division to be called Hartlepool with Stockton; and the Teeside South and Langbaurgh Divisions shall be merged and into a new Division called Teeside South with Langbaurgh. The amalgamation was made at the request of the General Commissioners in all of the Divisions with the aim of improving the organisational efficiency of the Divisions in the Counties of Cleveland and North Yorkshire. I have placed a copy of the Order amalgamating the Divisions in the Library of this House.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

University Places

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanism she intends to use to guarantee places at universities for students whose exam marks are upgraded as a result of re-marking. [74623]

Margaret Hodge: Universities UK and SCOP, the representative bodies of universities and Higher Education colleges, have already advised all their members to honour the offers they made prior to the publication of A level results in August. If, as a result of the review, a student is now eligible to take up a place, they will be able to do so, either this year or in 2003.

A-Levels

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what meetings she has held since 1 September with Universities UK and higher education providers to discuss the implications of downgrading of A-levels and the implementation of guaranteed places. [74694]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* My right hon. Friend met Professor Roderick Floud, President of Universities UK, on 27 September in order to discuss the implications of the A-level grading review.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money for individual learning accounts has been *(a)* claimed, *(b)* paid and *(c)* withheld or is in dispute in each month since August 2001; and if she will make a statement. [74291]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The amounts claimed, paid, and withheld at the end of each month from August 2001 to end September 2002 are set out in the following table. The amounts in the withheld column relate to those claims from registered Individual Learning Account (ILA) providers which are subject to validation checks and/or investigation. The claims withheld are those which are in dispute.

At the time of closure on 23 November a total of £19.4 million relating to learning episodes confirmed on the ILA Centre system was awaiting payment and therefore outstanding. Following validation checks payments for eligible learning relating to this amount were subsequently made in December and January.

ILA programme rules allowed bookings to be made 6 months in advance of the learning episode, so booked learning could be confirmed up to and including 22 May 2002. A paper based claims and payment system was introduced in January 2002 to allow providers to confirm and claim for delivery of this advanced booked learning. Claims, payments and amounts withheld are reflected in the table. In addition an estimated sum of £5.3 million remains unclaimed relating to advance booked learning by providers who cannot be invited to claim until all investigations are complete.

Month	*Amount claimed (a)*	*Amount paid (b)*	*Amount withheld/in dispute (c)*
August 2001	24,672,600	*26,216,174	1,580,245
September 2001	26,401,842	25,818,692	583,150
October 2001	39,173,099	*39,251,249	0
November 2001	51,334,141	31,789,658	113,100
December 2001	0	3,495,594	11,280,502
January 2002	0	*2,241,238	2,422,450
February 2002	559,290	*507,636	107,854
March 2002	3,299,073	*1,937,840	1,365,652

Month	Amount claimed (a)	Amount paid (b)	Amount withheld/in dispute (c)
April 2002	2,078,824	*1,555,490	540,489
May 2002	1,048,282	*928,924	199,303
June 2002	380,898	*382,371	68,672
July 2002	424,740	*376,857	170,918
August 2002	20,535	*20,564	1,702
September 2002	22,069	*23,671	0

Note:
(Payments marked * include amounts released from earlier claims which had been previously withheld.)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged, *(c)* released without charge, *(d)* cautioned, *(e)* prosecuted, *(f)* acquitted, *(g)* convicted, *(h)* fined, *(i)* given a community service and *(j)* jailed in connection with abuse of individual learning accounts, in each quarter since October 2001; how many registered individual learning account providers have been referred to the individual learning accounts compliance unit; and if she will make a statement. [74289]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In connection with abuse of the Individual Learning Account (ILA) programme, which was closed on 23 November 2001, at the end of September 2002 *(a)* 57 individuals have been arrested (12 individuals were arrested in September 2001), *(b)* 11 charged, *(c)* 12 released without charge, *(d)* 10 cautioned, *(e)* 1 prosecuted, *(f)* none acquitted, *(g)* 1 convicted, *(h)* none fined, *(i)* 1 given a community service order and *(j)* 1 jailed. The table below shows the position by quarter from October 2001.

Quarter Ending	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)	(i)	(j)
Dec 01	27	1			1		1		1	1
Mar 02	6	10	12	10						
June 02	2									
Sept 02	10									

Note:
698 registered learning providers have been referred to the Department's Compliance Unit.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many cases of apparent abuse of individual learning accounts by providers have been referred to *(a)* the Individual Learning Accounts Compliance Unit *(b)* her Department's Special Investigations Unit and *(c)* the police; and if she will make a statement. [74290]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since 23 November 2001, 698 registered Individual Learning Account (ILA) providers have been referred to the ILA Compliance Unit. Of these, 150 have been passed onto to the Department's Special Investigation's Unit (SIU). The Compliance Unit has completed reviews on a further 228 providers. For 70 providers no evidence of irregular claims was found. The remaining 158 providers were sent letters by 1 October setting out the results of the review work and the basis for a settlement. In addition a further 320 providers are awaiting follow-up by the Compliance Unit.

Of the 150 registered learning providers referred to the SIU, 99 have been referred to the police.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many individual learning account providers currently have payments withheld; and if she will make a statement. [74292]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: From commencement of the Individual Learning Account (ILA) programme to the end of September, £16.8 million of claims from 267 registered learning providers has been withheld pending the results of investigations.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when an announcement will be made on a successor scheme to the individual learning account. [74293]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government is committed to introducing a successor scheme to Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs). The new scheme will build on the best and most successful features of ILAs and take into account the lessons we have learnt from the design and delivery of the programme. It is our intention to make a further announcement later in the autumn.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

British Culture Promotion

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding her Department provides to promote British culture abroad. [73913]

Dr. Howells: The Department does not directly fund the promotion of British culture abroad. However, the British Tourist Authority often features aspects of British culture in its programme to attract visitors to this country and many other institutions and events which receive funds from the Department play a significant part in establishing international awareness of British Culture.

Gambling

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish her response to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee's report on gambling. [75901]

Mr. Caborn: We have today laid before both Houses a Command Paper (no. 5622) setting out the Government's response to the report of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee—"The Government's Proposals For Gambling: Nothing To Lose?"

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies her Department has undertaken to assess the impact of the proposed mid-term CAP review; [72358]

Mr. Simmons: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's discussions with the EU regarding the reform of the CAP. [72360]

Alun Michael: Discussions on the mid-term review of the CAP are continuing within the EU. Elements of the package were discussed at the Agriculture Council earlier this week. The Government have submitted evidence to the Select Committee's Inquiry into the reform of the CAP.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement about reforming the Common Agricultural Policy. [72375]

Alun Michael: Discussions on the mid-term review of the CAP are continuing within the EU.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what contingency plans exist for dealing with further outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [72361]

Mr. Morley: Contingency plans for a future outbreak of foot and mouth disease are set out in Defra's interim contingency plan, which is available on the Defra website with an electronic mailbox for comments.

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her assessment of the reports she has received over the last four months on the foot and mouth outbreak. [72373]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made to the House on 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 669.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next expects to meet representatives of the livestock farming sector to discuss the lessons to be learned from the recent foot and mouth epidemic. [72374]

Mr. Morley: I and my ministerial colleagues meet livestock industry representatives on a regular basis. My noble Friend the Minister for Food and Farming chaired a meeting last month with a wide range of interested parties to discuss the Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiry reports.

Livestock Auction Marts

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what future role she envisages for livestock auction marts. [72363]

Mr. Morley: Livestock auction markets have an important role in the marketing of farm animals between the various stages of production and some markets may be suitable for a range of activities or for more diversified marketing. This issue is of particular importance where large numbers of cross-bred breeding stock and store stock for fattening are sold off the hills to lowland farms such as, for example, in the Northern Uplands. We are in contact with industry interests to help identify and respond to day to day issues as well as to consider together the longer-term marketing framework.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the result of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [72364]

Mr. Meacher: The UK secured good outcomes on many issues including key agreements on:

new targets and timetables on access to sanitation, production and use of chemicals, reduction of biodiversity loss, restoration of fish stocks, creation of marine protected areas, implementation of national strategies for sustainable development;

urgent actions on access to reliable and affordable energy for all and to increase the share of renewable energy worldwide, illegal logging and fishing, corporate social responsibility, and a framework of programmes to move towards sustainable production and consumption patterns.

Over 300 multi-stakeholder partnerships to help deliver action on the ground, representing significant additional resources. The UK instigated or supported more than 20, including the Prime Minister's five sectoral initiatives on financial services, water, energy, forestry and tourism.

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the outcome of the World Summmit on Sustainable Development and its follow up. [76116]

Margaret Beckett: The World Summit on Sustainable Development addressed some of the greatest challenges of our times. For over a year I had said the Summit should be about more than just fine words. It should be about a step-change—a move from words to concerted action and implementation. And it was. I also made clear from the beginning that separate fora would take forward discussion on climate change and on trade, including trade in agricultural produce.

So Johannesburg built on the success of last year's Doha talks on the new trade round, the Marrakech accords on climate change and this year's Monterrey conference on financing for development. It reaffirmed and strengthened the international community's commitment to sustainable development, and reinvigorated the Rio Earth Summit agreements as well as the UN Millennium Development Goals on poverty eradication. There are no silver-bullet solutions, no miracle cures. But what we do have is a new political commitment, momentum and energy for the attainment of a sustainable world.

As in all negotiations, we were rightly ambitious, given the agenda we had. I judge the final deal reached between the 180 participating countries—for which the UK, led by the Prime Minister, negotiated hard—to be a successful outcome. We went to Johannesburg to

make a concrete difference to people's lives. I believe that we succeeded. And, whilst I understand the disappointment of those who pushed us for more, I believe that what was achieved, taken in conjunction with the UN Millennium Development Goals will, if implemented, represent a revolution in the lives of the poorest people on the planet, and the beginnings of a revolution in how we treat the planet itself.

The Summit agreed an impressive plan of implementation. We agreed a new target to halve by 2015 the proportion of people living without basic sanitation. This will save millions of lives in developing countries, and support existing goals on safe drinking water and health. There are also new targets and timetables on chemicals, biodiversity, marine protection and fish stocks. These and other commitments will galvanise action and set standards for the next 10 years or more.

The Summit also agreed joint actions on reliable and affordable energy provision for the poor and to urgently and substantially increase the global share of renewable energy sources. The provision of energy is a prerequisite for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Summit did not set a global target for renewables, but even those countries which resisted a global target have nevertheless committed themselves to domestic action. At the Summit the Prime Minister announced that the UK's Export Credit Guarantee Department will make available £50m per year to renewable energy exports to developing countries.

And on climate change, Johannesburg issued a ringing call for countries to ratify the Kyoto protocol. Three key developing countries—China, India and Brazil—recently ratified. Crucially, in his positive statement at the Summit, the Russian Prime Minister Kasyanov again signalled that Russia is preparing to ratify the Protocol. The Canadian Prime Minister, Chretien, said that Canada will make a decision on ratification later this year. We are hopeful that the Kyoto Protocol might enter into force in early 2003.

Over 300 new partnerships were also launched at the Summit representing in excess of $235million in resources. We are familiar with the idea of partnerships at home. But this is a bold new idea for the UN. These partnerships will be the unique inheritance of Johannesburg—they are not a substitute for multilateral commitments, but they will provide additional and complementary resources. For example, the EU "Water for Life Initiative" and the UK-led multistakeholder partnership for water and sanitation will support the delivery of the new sanitation target and the existing goals on safe drinking water and health.

Johannesburg has given the global community a strong mandate for intensified action at global, regional and national levels. More fundamentally, it has forged close links between development and environment policy, in the service of sustainable development. There is now a widespread agreement that development assistance should be directed at helping the poor and that it needs to be sustainable if it is to be of lasting benefit. Sustainable management of natural resources and of the environment are essential for poverty eradication. This now needs to be reflected in the poverty reduction and sustainable development strategies of developing countries.

We shall work with our partners in the international institutions—the UN, the G8 and the OECD—to ensure that development and environment policy are mutually supportive. We need to ensure that the follow-up to Johannesburg, Monterrey and the Millennium Development Goals is coherent.

International trade, and climate change issues already have dedicated international processes of their own. On both, the UK Government is taking a lead role.

The Prime Minister has hammered home the case for trade reform, especially of agricultural subsidies. Developing countries need improved market access, so they can sell their produce fairly, without being hampered by trade-distorting and environmentally-damaging subsidies in the developed countries. This is the single most important issue we need to follow up after Johannesburg. Improved market access and subsidy reform are a joint concern for development and environment policy. Currently OECD countries give around $55billion in overseas aid, but subsidise their agricultural industries by around seven times that amount. CAFOD have suggested that through the CAP the average European dairy cow gets a $2 subsidy a day—the same as the daily income of half the world's population. We will continue to push for reform of agricultural subsidies both within the WTO and, within the EU, on the Common Agricultural Policy.

On climate change, later this month I shall be in Delhi for the next stage of the UN negotiations on implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

The implementation of the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy will be a driver for change in Europe. In particular, it will need to reflect the Summit agreement to develop a global ten-year framework of action programmes to accelerate the shift towards sustainable production and consumption. We need to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation—to get more from less. The industrialised North has agreed to take the lead on this and it must be central to the EU's Strategy. This means action on a whole range of issues such as energy efficiency, waste minimisation—a real challenge for us in the UK—and integrated product policy.

But equally important is action we will take at home. We will integrate the Johannesburg agreements and relevant follow-up into UK policy and action, with a sharp focus on the use of technological innovation to deliver sustainable development. If, as a nation, we achieve greater resource efficiency, this will not only help our environment but also improve our competitiveness.

On energy, we are working towards our 10 per cent. renewable electricity target by 2010. We are making great strides in both energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty. On climate change we have been leading globally in the Kyoto process. We are on track to meet our Kyoto target of a 12.5 per cent. reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and have put in place a

comprehensive programme of measures to meet our more ambitious domestic goal to reduce our emissions of carbon dioxide by 20 per cent.

The Government will shortly publish an Energy White Paper that addresses how to set the UK on the longer term path to a low carbon economy, as the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and others have recommended. In particular, the Commission has recommended we put ourselves on the path to 60 per cent. reductions in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. We will respond formally to that recommendation at the time of the White Paper, but already it is clear that action on that scale—in the UK and internationally—is what is necessary.

This Autumn we shall be taking receipt of, and later responding to, the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit's report on how we manage waste, stemming growth, and promoting recycling and re-use.

Last week I hosted a meeting with leading UK stakeholders, to discuss the follow-up action by government and stakeholders at UK level. This provided a useful forum for us to discuss the proposals developed by stakeholders and within government, and to establish some shared conclusions on the implications of the Summit.

Our next review of progress toward sustainable development, which will be out early in the new year, will include further details on how we intend to take the Johannesburg outcomes forward. Over the course of the next year, we will also be reviewing the UK Sustainable Development Strategy and meeting our Summit commitments will form a significant part of this.

Perhaps the most innovative feature of the Summit was the emphasis on partnerships between governments and civil society; particularly NGOs and business. The UK delegation therefore included Members of this House, representatives from the devolved administrations, local government, the UK Sustainable Development Commission, from business and NGOs. And since this was a Summit on the future, 4 youth representatives. Besides the formal government negotiations there was a wealth of other events and initiatives. UK participants were active everywhere and made a huge contribution to the overall outcome. Governments must take the lead in setting the framework for sustainable development, they cannot deliver it alone.

Johannesburg demonstrated that it is possible to reach agreement on practical steps towards a more sustainable world. We must, and will, keep moving forward. In the words of the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan; "This Summit will put us on a path that reduces poverty while protecting the environment, a path that works for all peoples, rich and poor, today and tomorrow. We have to go out and take action. This is not the end. It's the beginning."

Hunting

Mr. Goodman: to ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the outcome of consultations on the future of hunting. [72366]

Alun Michael: I am now in the last stages of the process I announced on 21 March in my statement to the House, *Official Report*, column 457.

During this period I have written three times to all Members of Parliament, Members of the House of Lords, and a wide range of organisations seeking comments and evidence. Last month I held three days of public hearings in Portcullis House when all three main campaign groups joined me to hear and question evidence given by experts.

This has been an exceptionally open and, as has been acknowledged on all sides, transparent process. I am now carefully examining the evidence I have received both in response to the letters and in the hearings, and I shall shortly bring forward proposals based on the principles and the process set out in my statement to this House on 21 March.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the outcome of consultations on the future of hunting. [72380]

Alun Michael: I am now in the last stages of the process I announced on 21 March in my statement to the House, *Official Report*, column 457.

During the last half year I have written twice to all Members of Parliament, Peers and a wide range of organisations seeking comments and evidence. In addition, last month I held three days of public hearings in Portcullis House when all three main campaign groups joined me to hear and question evidence given by experts.

This has been an exceptionally open process. I am now carefully examining the evidence I have received both in response to the letters and in the hearings, and I shall shortly bring forward legislative proposals based on the principles of minimising suffering and recognising utility.

Farmers (Wet Weather Aid)

Mr. Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Areas if she will give wet weather special aid to farmers. [72368]

Alun Michael: We have no plans to make national financial assistance available for the effects of wet weather. However, the Government is fully aware of the problems facing producers in certain areas of the United Kingdom, and through working closely with the European Commission, we have been able to bring forward payments to affected producers, and to secure exemptions for them from certain CAP scheme rules.

Household Waste

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the proportion of household waste that was recycled in the last year for which figures are available. [72369]

Mr. Meacher: The latest data from the Municipal Waste Management Survey 2000–01 show that the total proportion of household waste recycled or composted in

England in that period was just over 11 per cent.—an increase of about 1 per cent. over the previous year.

WEEE Directive

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what provisions have been made to comply with the requirements of the WEEE directive. [72370]

Mr. Meacher: The WEEE directive is still in draft. The text should be finalised later this year and this will allow detailed implementation plans to commence. There has already been significant consultation with business and other stakeholders. This will continue.

Surplus Fruit and Vegetables

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tonnes of fruit and vegetables were destroyed by the EU in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what funding was provided for this purpose. [72372]

Mr. Morley: Provisional figures for the marketing year 2001–02 indicate that some 0.6 million tonnes of fruit and vegetables were withdrawn from the EU market at a cost of 59 million euros (approximately £36 million).

Landfill

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the amount of waste going to landfill. [72379]

Mr. Meacher: Environment Agency data from 1998–89 indicate that around 57 per cent. of waste produced by households, commerce and industry (including construction and demolition) is landfilled in England and Wales. 2000–01 figures for municipal waste in England show 78 per cent. going to landfill.

The UK still landfills too great a proportion of its waste; this is neither sensible nor sustainable. However, in view of local authority recycling and composting targets, the forthcoming Landfill Directive targets to reduce the landfill of biodegradable waste and additional targets for the reducing the landfill of industrial and commercial waste, we would expect to see disposal to landfill to begin to decline over the next few years. Following the publication of the Strategy Unit's waste strategy review, the Government will consider what further action it can take to assist in this process.

Sustainable Farming

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the timetable for implementation of the Curry Report is; and if she will make a statement. [72381]

Alun Michael: In November, the Government intends to launch a new Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food in England. This strategy will include a response to all of the Policy Commission's recommendations, and will be informed by the wide-ranging process of stakeholder engagement that followed publication of their report.

Waste

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of waste in the last 12 months was incinerated; and if she will make a statement. [72365]

Mr. Meacher: A total of 9 per cent. of municipal waste is currently incinerated in England. The latest data for industrial and commercial waste, including construction and demolition waste, indicate that just under 4 per cent. is incinerated.

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representions she has received on the disposal of hazardous waste by incineration; and if she will make a statement. [72352]

Mr. Meacher: I have met representatives of the high temperature incineration industry. We are seeking to address their concerns in working towards a thorough assessment of the options for the disposal of hazardous waste.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to *(a)* receive and *(b)* respond to the Performance and Innovation Unit's review on waste. [72357]

Mr. Meacher: I expect the Strategy Unit to have completed its review of the UK waste strategy by the end of November; and I will look forward to considering its findings then.

Refrigerators

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much local authorities have received to defray the costs of storing refrigerators. [72359]

Mr. Meacher: In December 2001, we announced a grant of £6 million for local authorities to cover their costs up until March 2002 for the storage and disposal of refrigerators.

In addition, we announced special grant funding of £40 million for local authorities to cover their costs for this financial year. Additional help for future years was included in the Spending Review announced on 15 July.

Fish Stocks

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 13 July, Reference MC 172596/am, what information she has submitted to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea and its Advisory Council on Ecosystems about the proposal of Dr. David Conover that big fish should be returned to the sea, in the interests of total biomass harvested. [74195]

Mr. Morley: We have not drawn ICES' attention to the work of Dr. Conover. Our scientists have considered carefully Dr. Conover's work but have concluded that

his conclusions are likely to have limited relevance to fish stocks exploited in the waters around the UK. One of the main reasons for this is that there are relatively few large fish in our waters. The priority in our fisheries is to help overfished stocks to recover by reducing the overall fishing rate on all sizes of fish and to help juvenile fish to survive beyond the age of maturity.

Carbon Sequestration

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Minister of State (Environment)'s letter 171977/JW of 16 September 2002, what action has been taken to follow up issues about magnesium carbonate and carbon sequestration. [74448]

Mr. Meacher: Cement manufacture is a carbon intensive process and carbon dioxide emissions from this source in the UK are about 1 per cent. of our annual total emissions. Magnesium carbonate as an alternative to Portland Cement for use in the buildings and construction industry is claimed by a manufacturer in Australia to reduce the carbon emitted in manufacture and absorb carbon in use.

The Department of Trade and Industry funds a programme by the Buildings Research Establishment (BRE) that reviews development of low energy cements. Research is needed to prove the structure, durability and performance of magnesium carbonate in the UK context as well as confirming the claims for carbon sequestration and low embodied energy. BRE will be submitting an application for a research project on magnesium carbonate in this year's DTI Partners in Innovation competition round, and if successful the work would start in April 2003.

CAP

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the Government's response to the European Commission's mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy. [72350]

Alun Michael: Discussions on the mid-term review of the CAP are continuing.

Flooding (Huntingdon)

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what provision there is to provide support to *(a)* home owners, *(b)* farmers and *(c)* businesses whose properties have been, or may in the future be, subject to flooding in the Huntingdon constituency. [74223]

Mr. Morley: Flooding is a natural phenomenon and whilst it is not possible to eliminate the risk totally, the flood and coastal defence operating authorities have permissive powers to reduce that risk. It has been the policy of successive Governments not to pay compensation to those affected by flooding as it is generally an insurable risk. However, we may be able to assist in reducing Government requirements on those affected, for example by relaxing the eligibility rules for agricultural support schemes or by considering estimation of VAT liabilities where floods have damaged paperwork. Businesses in need of this type of help should contact the relevant department if the need arises. Assistance to householders affected by flooding is provided by local authorities in the immediate aftermath of flooding, and in the case of serious hardship help may be available from the Social Fund.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under what guidelines the Environment Agency monitors dioxin emissions from Waste Disposal incinerators; to whom the Environment Agency is accountable in this respect; and if she will make a statement. [73481]

Mr. Meacher: As set out in the Waste Incineration Directive (WID), the Environment Agency requires operators to measure emissions from municipal waste incinerators at least every 3 months during the first 12 months of a new installation. In subsequent years operators must take at least two measurements per year.

Dioxins in England and Wales can be measured using two validated methods; a European standard BS EN 1948 and the USEPA Method 23. Historically, USEPA method 23 has been used and is considered an acceptable standard for dioxin emission limit values of 1ng/m^3 and above. However, WID will impose a limit of 0.1ng/m^3 from 28 December 2005 and, as the Agency has already started moving towards this new limit, European Standard EN 1948 is being used in the majority of cases for regulatory compliance monitoring of municipal waste incinerators. EN 1948 has been validated on a large number of European incinerators, the measurement uncertainty has been determined and the appropriate quality assurance/quality control measures have been introduced. Both methods require samples to be taken over a period of six to eight hours. Samples are then removed for laboratory analysis using sophisticated and time consuming techniques.

The analysis of dioxin levels is a difficult and expensive process which only a few laboratories in the UK are able to carry out. The laboratories are independent, with a broad client base including Government agencies as well as various sectors of industry. The laboratories are subject to quality assurance schemes (such as UKAS) and are fully open to individual and Government scrutiny.

The Agency is currently researching other ways of sampling incinerator emissions of dioxins. A research programme is in place investigating the performance of continuous dioxin sampling systems that have recently been employed in some European countries.

The Agency is accountable for its activities in England to the Secretary of State. Regulation of the incineration industry by the Agency and its predecessors has been very effective. Over the past eleven years there has been a very significant decrease in the discharge of dioxins from municipal waste incinerators. In 1990 they released 605.26g ITEQ, but by 1999 this figure had fallen to 1.05g ITEQ. In 2001 the sector released 0.81g ITEQ.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many waste disposal incinerators she expects to be required in the United Kingdom for the implementation of the Government's Waste Disposal Strategy 2000. [73487]

Mr. Meacher: The Government has no plans that local authorities should provide any particular number of incinerators.

They are required to take account of the policy framework set out in Waste Strategy 2000 (Cm4693–2), including achieving targets set for recycling and recovery and the need to progressively divert increasing amounts of waste from landfill.

With the growth in municipal waste of 3–4 per cent. per annum in recent years, fulfilling our obligations through minimisation and recycling, although desirable, may not be feasible alone. In that case there is a range of technologies, in addition to conventional incineration, available for treating and disposing of waste. This includes those advanced conversion technologies which qualify as sources of renewable energy under the Renewables Obligation Order 2002.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what proportion of dioxins emitted from waste disposal incinerators she estimates enters the food chain; [73488]

(2) what assessment she has made of what happens to dioxins emitted from waste disposal incinerators which do not enter the food chain. [73489]

Mr. Meacher: Concentrations of dioxins in food are controlled by the levels in the surrounding environment, the critical factor for which is the concentration in air. Air concentrations are controlled by emissions from primary sources and by complex exchanges/recycling of dioxins with water, soil and vegetation. Dioxins may subsequently enter the food chain through vegetation and the diet of animals.

It is not possible to estimate what proportion of dioxins emitted from municipal solid waste (MSW) incinerators enters the food chain but, because they contribute less than 1 per cent. of total dioxins emissions, we can say that they make only a minor contribution to levels in food.

Dioxins which do not enter the food chain remain in the environment and low levels of dioxins can be detected in all environmental media. In the UK the mean levels are currently approximately:

Air (ambient rural) 10 femtograms per cubic metre

Air (ambient urban) 100 femtograms per cubic metre

Soil (rural) 5 nanograms per kilogram

Soil (urban) 30 nanograms per kilogram

River sediments 20 nanograms per kilogram,

where one femtogram is one thousandth of a millionth of a millionth of a gram (10^{-15} g) and one nanogram is one thousandth of a millionth of a gram (10^{-9} g).

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take measures to ensure that dioxin emissions from waste disposal incinerators are monitored more frequently. [73483]

Mr. Meacher: Municipal solid waste incinerators are regularly monitored by operators on a six monthly basis to check compliance with the EU wide emission standards. It is a breach of operators' authorisation conditions not to carry out this monitoring.

Additionally, the Environment Agency carries out independent check monitoring at a minimum frequency of once per year. All monitoring results, including those carried out by the operators, are available on public registers.

This monitoring frequency is in excess of the bi-annual monitoring required as a minimum by the new Waste Incineration Directive. It is open to the Environment Agency to require or perform more frequent monitoring if that is considered necessary.

In tightening this year the authorisations under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 of existing municipal solid waste incinerators, the Environment Agency has applied a condition requiring the operators to report on a review of techniques for continuous dioxin monitoring, including cost, availability, accuracy, detection limits etc by 1 January 2003.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will further limit the acceptable amount of dioxin which may be emitted from waste disposal incinerators. [73484]

Mr. Meacher: Dioxin emissions from municipal solid waste incinerators are limited by authorisation conditions issued under the Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) regime. This regulatory regime is being subsumed into the even more exacting Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC). Existing installations will have to apply for IPPC permits by 31 August 2005.

Additionally, we are currently transposing the new Waste Incineration Directive (WID), which will further tighten dioxin emissions standards tenfold to 0.1 ng/m^3—the level considered technically achievable when the Directive was finalised in 2000. This will apply to all new incinerators within its scope by 28 December 2002, and to existing plant by 28 December 2005.

The Environment Agency has also recently varied the authorisations for existing municipal solid waste incinerators to reduce the dioxin emission limit to that required by the WID ahead of the required timescale. The IPPC Directive requires that permit conditions for these incinerations be set on the basis of best available techniques (BAT) for incinerator design and operation, and that those conditions be reconsidered in the event that future substantial changes in BAT make it possible to reduce emissions significantly below the WID standard without imposing excessive costs.

Landfill

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which landfill site operators have submitted site conditioning plans; in each case *(a)* what classification they are seeking for their site, *(b)* for what capacity and *(c)* what substances; and which operators have not submitted plans. [73723]

Mr. Meacher: To comply with the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002, landfill operators had to submit a conditioning plan to the Environment Agency (EA), for each individual landfill site, by 16 July 2002.

As part of that plan, operators have to state which of the three types of landfill they wish the site to be classed as—hazardous; non-hazardous or inert.

The latest information indicates that conditioning plans have been submitted for over 940 landfill sites, with some 228 seeking to operate as hazardous waste landfills. The total number submitted represents approximately 90 per cent. of the plans that were expected by the EA. The Agency are currently checking the plans that have been received and are actively chasing-up the remainder.

Details of conditioning plans have to be placed on the Agency's public registers, however operators can apply for information concerning individual sites to be witheld if it is commercially confidential. Pending resolution of any such claims the information cannot be made public.

Nevertheless by early September the EA expects to be in a position to publish a complete list of landfills for which conditioning plans have been received and will indicate on that list which sites have been classified as landfills for hazardous waste.

Public Buildings

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 3 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 376W, on public buildings, if she will name the projects sponsored; and if she will make a statement on the Design Champion's personal input in respect of each. [73641]

Mr. Morley: As Design Champion for Defra I am sponsoring the building projects at Old Rectory Farm in Surrey and at Drayton in Warwickshire for the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE) programme. I have received briefings on them and commented on design issues.

Countryside Access

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason parliamentarians are not included in the Schedule on page 27 of the Access to the Countryside (Provisional and Conclusive Maps) (England) Regulations 2002 (SI 1710); and if she will make a statement. [73415]

Alun Michael: The Regulations provide for provisional reduced scale maps to be made widely available for inspection, both in the locality to which they relate, and on the internet, at www.countryside.gov.uk/access/mapping. They will also to be sent to a similar range of organisations as receive draft maps, including land manager and user representative bodies, as well as parish councils and local access forums. The maps are costly to produce and bulky to store: in view of their availability on the internet and in Members' constituencies, I believe it would be unwelcome and unnecessary to supply paper copies to all Members. However, the Countryside Agency has agreed to supply reduced scale draft, provisional or conclusive maps showing Members' constituencies to any Member on request.

Meat Imports

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what controls on meat imports are in place to guard against foot and mouth and other diseases. [73654]

Mr. Morley: All legally presented consignments of fresh meat imported into the UK from other EU Member States must have been produced in accordance with Community rules laid down in Council Directive 64/433/EEC. Imports from third countries must have been produced to standards at least equivalent to those in the Directive. The European Commission's Food and Veterinary office is responsible for carrying out inspections in third countries from which fresh meat is imported into the community.

In respect of the importation of meat into the United Kingdom and the risk posed by FMD, European Community legislation permits us to import meat from certain countries where FMD is present but only where the disease is restricted to specific areas. Community legislation allows us to take appropriate safeguard action, which may include a ban on imports of meat from all, or parts of that country.

All imported meat in to the United Kingdom from third countries must enter at a designated Border Inspection Post where it is subject to veterinary inspections. All consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and at least 20 per cent. of consignments undergo physical checks. These checks ensure that import conditions are met and that the products remain in a satisfactory condition during transport.

The Government accepts more needs to be done to tackle illicit trade. An Action plan was published at the end of March which contains a range of measures. A progress report was issued on 8 July. A copy can be viewed on the Defra Illegal Imports website (http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/illegali).

SCOTLAND

Minimum Wage

Mrs. Irene Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action has been taken against employers in Paisley North who have failed to pay the national minimum wage. [73680]

Mrs. McGuire: The information is not held in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, Inland Revenue has specialist enforcement teams based in Aberdeen and East Kilbride who are responsible for enforcing the national minimum wage in Scotland. The teams follow up complaints made by workers and third parties about non-compliance and use other Revenue risk based data to identify employers for enquiry. Since April 1999, the teams have conducted 1,910 inspections and recovered over £660,000 in wage arrears for low paid workers in Scotland.

Electoral Register

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she expects to publish proposals under section 12 of the Scotland Act 1998 to ensure MSPs are entitled to a free copy of the electoral register. [73721]

Mrs. McGuire: The draft of the Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) Order 2002, which contains provisions enabling the supply of free copies of the full version of the electoral register to MSPs, was laid before Parliament on 16 October. Subject to parliamentary approval by both Houses, the Order will come into force 14 days after it is made.

Rail Freight Services

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to ensure that rail freight services between Scotland and the continent via the Channel Tunnel will recommence their operation. [73730]

Mrs. McGuire: The Government has ensured, through close co-operation with the French authorities, that initial physical security measures at Fréthun are almost complete and are proving effective. We will continue to work to ensure completion of the agreed measures later this year.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the French Minister for the Interior met on 26 September at Calais and reaffirmed their commitment to the measures set out in their communiqué of 12 July. On the specific issue of rail freight services, they announced that security considerations were no longer a constraint on rail freight service levels. France is committed to increasing the levels of security at the site, including gendarme presence, as the rail traffic increases.

At present the Channel Tunnel is fully operational for freight operators, including services between Scotland and the Continent, between the hours of 14h00 and 03h00. The SRA, EWS and SNCF are discussing the progressive restoration of a full and reliable 24-hour service.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to help eliminate fuel poverty in Scotland. [73729]

Mrs. McGuire: The Government is working in partnership with the Scottish Executive to tackle fuel poverty. Measures the Government have taken include the £200 Winter Fuel Payments for people aged 60 and over; the cold weather payments for people on Income Support and some other benefits; and reducing VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Director General for Criminal Justice System Information Technology

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Director General for Criminal Justice System Information Technology was appointed. [73227]

Hilary Benn: The Director General for Criminal Justice System Information Technology was appointed on 12 December 2001.

Criminal Justice

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he will respond to the widespread public belief found in "Improving Public Attitudes to the Criminal Justice System", Home Office Research Study 245, that prison was the most effective sentence for reducing crime. [73783]

Hilary Benn: There is no doubt that, for some offenders, prison is both an appropriate punishment and a factor in reducing crime. The same Home Office study also shows that the general public sees prison combined with supervision in the community as a sentence, which is effective in reducing crime. 72 per cent. of the general public in the study thought that a sentence of three months followed by three months supervision was more constructive than six months imprisonment. That system of combining custody with supervision is proposed in our Custody Plus scheme outlined in the white paper "Justice for All".

Other disposals such as restorative justice schemes and drug treatment schemes also received high ratings from the public in this report. The Government does believe that the public should be given better information about the alternatives to custody that exist and their effectiveness in reducing crime and re-offending.

Sentences are not just about reducing crime, however; there may be many reasons for imposing a particular sentence including protecting the public, punishing the offender or rehabilitating the offender. We need therefore to retain a range of different types of sentence appropriate for different offenders and different crimes.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he will take in response to the finding in "Improving Public Attitudes to the Criminal Justice System", Home Office Research Study 245, that the provision of simple factual information about crime and sentencing had an impact on confidence in the criminal justice system. [73784]

Hilary Benn: In the Criminal Justice White Paper "Justice for All" it was proposed to create a Sentencing Guidelines Council (para 5.15). One of the functions of the Council will be to publish Guidelines "in a way that is easily accessible to the public as well as to the judiciary and other legal practitioners" (para 5.16) and sentencers will be required to take those guidelines into account both in their decisions and in framing the reasons for their decisions. This is designed to provide a common point of reference for the public and to enable greater consistency in sentencing across the country.

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by his Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within his Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [74685]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Department is unable to provide a full answer with the level of detailed information sought on external consultants and companies that provide public relations, communications advertising, marketing, accountancy, and banking services for the period in question. Records are not held centrally and therefore to provide a full response for the Home Office and its Agencies would incur disproportionate costs. We are, however able to provide a total expenditure figure for external consultants and other companies listed from June 2001 to date which is £41,671,404.94.

Murder Convictions

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of those convicted for murder since 1972 have subsequently reoffended on release; and if he will make a statement on the nature of the crimes committed on reoffending. [74547]

Hilary Benn: Since 1972, eight per cent. of persons released from prison following a conviction for murder were reconvicted for a standard list offence within two years of release. The most common offences on reconviction were theft and handling (45 per cent. of those reconvicted), violence against the person (22 per cent.) and burglary (13 per cent.). Around one per cent. of those released were reconvicted within two years for an indictable crime with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment; these crimes include homicide, serious wounding, rape, robbery, and arson endangering life.

Asylum Seekers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 July, Ref 56636, if there is a backlog in the National Asylum Support Agency dealing with correspondence; and what the average deviation is from the last three and ten working day targets. [73929]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* The Operations Section of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is currently receiving an average of 1,800 letters per week which have a target of three days for completion. These are requests for payment of the additional single payment and replacement certificates to enable supported asylum seekers to receive free prescriptions etc. Officials are meeting the three day target for processing these applications.

In addition the Operations Section is receiving an average of 1,400 items of correspondence relating to more complex issues such as requests to be relocated. Currently there are 2,000 cases which have not been finally resolved. But all have received action within the 10 day target and cannot be finally resolved because of the need to obtain additional information.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for the return to Afghanistan of those not in need of international protection. [75902]

Beverley Hughes: A Tripartite Agreement by the Government, the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was signed on Saturday 12 October 2002 in Kabul following the successful conclusion of negotiations. The Agreement provides for return to Afghanistan in a managed and phased manner of those who have been established to have no protection needs. The United Kingdom is fully committed to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. As part of this it is important that return to Afghanistan is sustainable and the Agreement commits the United Kingdom Government to providing support to those returning, in Afghanistan, to ensure they are able to reestablish themselves in their homeland.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how pregnant women who are seeking asylum are informed of their eligibilty for the maternity grant; and how many claimed the grant in the last 12 months; [73973]

(2) how asylum seekers are informed how to claim the £50 one-off payment to which they are entitled after six months; and what proportion claimed this in the last 12 months. [73972]

Beverley Hughes: Information on eligibility for all support payments including the £50 additional single payment and the £300 maternity payment is given to asylum seekers by voluntary organisations grant funded by the Home Office. This information will also form an integral part of the briefing given to all asylum seekers whilst they are going through the Induction Centre process.

Information on maternity payments can also be found on the Home Office web-site.

Information is not held centrally on the number of applications made for additional single payments or payment of maternity grant. Information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 12 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Sard Aram Aziz. [74568]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 8 October 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 22 July from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Ifra Raja. [74565]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 3 October 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 25 July from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Kourosh Jahanshahi. [74564]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 2 October 2002.

Immigration

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many clandestine entrants into the United Kingdom were detected *(a)* on entry and *(b)* in the country in each month since March 2001. [73982]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* Provisional information on the number of clandestine entrants detected and served with illegal entry papers in the period April to December 2001 is given in the table.

Clandestines detected and served with illegal entry papers

Month	*On-entry*	*In-country*	*Total*
April 2001	60	3,460	3,525
May 2001	335	2,865	3,205
June 2001	70	2,530	2,600
July 2001	130	2,820	2,950
August 2001	150	2,870	3,020
September 2001	115	2,600	2,715
October 2001	75	2,950	3,025
November 2001	80	2,835	2,915
December 2001	80	2,345	2,425

Note:
Provisional data, subject to possible change.
Figures rounded to the nearest five, and may not sum due to rounding.

It should be noted that the figures relate to the date on which the illegal entry notice was served. In-country detections could relate to an individual who entered the United Kingdom in an earlier period.

More recent information is not yet available. Figures on illegal entry papers served are published annually in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom", the 2001 edition of which was published on 26 September 2002. Figures for 2002 will be published in the second half of 2003. Early indications are, however, that the use of technology to detect claudestine entrants is increasing detection rates.

Euro

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his latest estimate is of the cost to his Department of changeover to the euro; and if he will make a statement. [73694]

Mr. Blunkett: It is not yet possible to estimate how much it would cost the Home Office to change to the euro. The department is taking action to ensure that it would be ready to implement any decision by the Government. The cost would depend on a number of decisions yet to be taken including timing and the details of conversion policies.

Charter Airlines

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposals for charter airline operators to provide mass data on all passengers carried on their planes. [71421]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* Paragraph 17 of Schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act 2000 (as amended by section 119 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001) gives the power to an examining officer to make a written request to an air or sea carrier for information relating to passengers and goods on all air and sea journey to and from within the United Kingdom. This is an important measure to help us fight terrorism.

The Schedule 7 to the Terrorism Act 2000 (Information) Order 2002 is the enabling power for this provision. The Order was approved by Parliament on 22 July and came into force on 22 August.

Discussions are continuing, which include carriers from all sectors of the industry, including charter airline operators, on the detailed implementation of the Order, and I have assured the industry that the powers will not be used, except in an emergency, until our consultation is complete.

Mandatory Life Sentences

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedural changes are being made following the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights of 28 May in the case of Stafford concerning the release of mandatory life sentence prisoners. [75903]

Hilary Benn: Mandatory life sentence prisoners who have served the minimum period necessary to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence, have their cases reviewed periodically by the Parole Board. At present responsibility for their release rests with the Secretary of State. This responsibility cannot be conferred on the Parole Board or any other body without primary legislation.

As an interim measure, the Home Secretary has decided to change the administrative arrangements for the review and release of mandatory life sentence prisoners. These administrative arrangements will apply to all such prisoners whose next Parole Board review begins on or after 1 January 2003. The changes will mean that in most instances these prisoners' cases will be heard initially, as now, by the Parole Board on the papers which will make a provisional recommendation. If prisoners wish to make representations about provisional recommendations it will then be open to them to request an oral hearing before the Parole Board at which they may have legal representation. They will normally receive full disclosure of all material relevant to the question of whether they should be released. They will also be able to examine and cross-examine witnesses. Similarly the Secretary of State may also require an oral hearing of the Board in cases where he believes further examination of the evidence is required.

If, at the end of the review process, the Parole Board favours the release of a mandatory life sentence prisoner once the minimum period has been served the Home Secretary will normally accept such a recommendation.

The Stafford judgment affects only the process by which the decision is made on whether to release mandatory life sentence prisoners. It does not relate to the period of detention which such prisoners must serve to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence, or Parole Board reviews that take place before the end of that period. There will usually be no change to the dates set for Parole Board reviews of prisoners who have served that period. Those prisoners serving whole life tariffs do not have their cases referred to the Parole Board.

TREASURY

Tax Avoidance

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies his Department is undertaking of tax avoidance by captive insurance companies based in UK overseas dependent territories; and if he will make a statement. [74798]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue regularly monitors the effectiveness of measures to prevent tax avoidance by captive insurance companies.

Inland Revenue Special Investigation Section

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revenues have been recovered by the Inland Revenue's special investigation section in each of the last five fiscal years; and if he will make a statement. [74799]

Dawn Primarolo: Special Investigations Section ("SIS") is the Inland Revenue's specialist unit that seeks to tackle tax avoidance. The nature of the compliance work undertaken by SIS is such that the yield can vary significantly from one year to the next. The yield for the last 5 years is as follows;

Year ended 31 March 1998	£109.3 million
Year ended 31 March 1999	£171.5 million
Year ended 31 March 2000	£111.7 million
Year ended 31 March 2001	£66 million
Year ended 31 March 2002	£90.4 million

The yield for the first 6 months of the current year is already greater than that achieved for last year.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will identify the components of the line labelled Tax Credits in table A10 in the Comprehensive Spending Review document, Command Paper 5570; whether it includes all personal tax credit expenditure that is classified as negative taxation; and if he will make a statement on the reduction in the figure between 2002–03 and 2003–04. [74709]

Dawn Primarolo: The tax credits line in Table A10 of the 2002 Spending Review white paper (Command Paper 5570) covers spending on tax credits which is classified as expenditure by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the National Accounts but as negative taxation on the basis of OECD revenue statistics rules. Spending on tax credits classified as expenditure under both ONS and OECD guidelines is included in Table A2 of the 2002 Spending Review white paper.

The tax credit figure in Table A10 falls between 2002–03 and 2003–04 because of changes in personal tax credits. Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) is classified partly as expenditure and partly as negative taxation under OECD guidelines but entirely as expenditure in National Accounts, so the Table A10 tax credit figure for 2002–03 includes the proportion of WFTC scored as negative taxation under OECD rules. However from April 2003 WFTC is being replaced by two new tax credits, the Working Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit, and the ONS have announced that these new tax credits will be classified in line with OECD classification rules in the National Accounts. Therefore no expenditure under these new tax credits scores in the tax credits line in Table A10 for 2003–04 onwards and the total falls considerably from 2002–03.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to communications data as defined in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, how many officials from *(a)* the Inland Revenue and *(b)* Customs and Excise he estimates will be authorised to seek access to communications data; and how many times officials have sought access to such data from communications providers such as Internet service providers under the Data Protection Act 1998 in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [74477]

Dawn Primarolo: In relation to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, Customs and Excise estimate that the number of authorised officials will be about 200. The Inland Revenue are not yet in a position to estimate a figure, but in any event authorised officials in the Inland Revenue will be restricted to the grades equivalent to Senior Executive Officer and Higher Executive Officer. In the last year, Customs and Excise officials have sought access to such data approximately 35,500 times and Inland Revenue officials approximately 11,700 times.

Consultancies

David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list external *(a)* public relations/ communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accountancy companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by his Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies/companies have performed within his Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/ companies. [74688]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensions

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the 2/3 limit on pensions received by employees earning less than £25,000 per annum and belonging to final salary schemes with an accrual rate of 1/60 per year; and if he will make a statement. [74548]

Ruth Kelly: On 15 March 2001 the Government announced a review aimed at developing an administrative simplification of the pension tax rules. This is, amongst other things, looking at limits on pensions. The Government has said that it will consult on the recommendations arising from this review later this year.

Departmental Staff

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff have moved out of employment of HM Treasury owing to reorganisation of the machinery of Government as a result of the creation of, and changing of functions of *(a)* the Office of Government Commerce, *(b)* the Debt Management Office and *(c)* other Chancellor's departments and agencies since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [74797]

Mr. Boateng: The number of people transferred permanently or on loan as a result of the creation of the following organisations were:

(a) the Office of Government Commerce—25

(b) the Debt Management Office—11

In addition, 94 staff transferred to the Treasury from DTI before transferring to the Financial Services Authority when it was established.

CABINET OFFICE

Emergency Planning

Mr. Francois: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he is taking to ensure that the emergency services have sufficient resources needed to deal effectively with the consequences of a substantial disaster. [73773]

Mr. Alexander: Since September 2001, all three emergency services have increased their holdings of personal protective equipment that will enable their personnel to work in hazardous environments after any incident involving chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear agents. In addition, the fire and ambulance services have purchased extra equipment with which to decontaminate and treat persons who have exposed to any of these agents.

Purchases of extra search and rescue equipment for use by fire brigades are also planned.

In addition, a nation-wide programme has been instituted for the joint training and exercising of senior officers from all three emergency services for such disasters.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what new methods are planned to ensure effective communication between the emergency services in the event of a substantial disaster. [73762]

Mr. Alexander: The police service have already begun to roll out a national radio network that will allow intraoperability between all forces if, and when, officers from different forces need to talk to one another.

The current radio systems of the fire and ambulance services are now due for renewal.

The Cabinet Office has ensured that the specifications include the requirement that the replacement systems are capable of interoperability with the systems of the other emergency services as well as intraoperability within their own service.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps the Government are taking to establish a review on local authority spending in the area of emegency planning. [73761]

Mr. Alexander: Local authority spending is being reviewed in the context of the work on a Civil Contingencies Bill. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 727W, which sets out further details of this work.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support Agency

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent measures have been taken to *(a)* modernise the Child Support Agency and *(b)* make it more efficient. [74416]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the letter sent to Members on 19 September 2002 by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place a copy of the new Child Support Agency Charter in the Library. [74718]

Malcolm Wicks: A copy was placed in the Library on 9 October.

New Deal

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on recent developments in the New Deal for Disabled People, with particular reference to *(a)* client participants and *(b)* recruitment and continuity of providers. [74671]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* Since the national extension of the New Deal for Disabled People programme began, it has helped over 5,000 people into jobs and more than 25,000 have registered with Job Brokers to actively pursue employment.

HEALTH

Parliamentary Questions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters to him from hon. Members remain unanswered; broken down by those which are (i) one

month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [73918]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* The table shows the number of outstanding parliamentary questions in the Department on 16 October 2002, which are over one month old.

Month Tabled	*Number of Parliamentary Questions Outstanding*
May	1
July	13

The table shows the number of letters in the Department which had not received an answer at 15 October 2002.

With a Received Date Between	*Number*
1 & 2 months	601
2 & 3 months	385
3 & 4 months	201
4 & 6 months	367
greater than 6 months	474

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what capacity his special advisers are involved in drafting answers to parliamentary questions tabled by hon. Members. [73921]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 15 October 2002]:* Officials with responsibility for the policy take the lead in drafting answers to parliamentary questions, which are then cleared by Ministers before a final reply is sent. There is no formal role for special advisers in this process, but they may from time to time be consulted by Ministers and/or officials about draft replies.

NHS Foundation Trusts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether borrowing by NHS foundation trusts will be backed up by Treasury guarantees. [74550]

Mr. Hutton: Details of the financial regime for National Health Service foundation trusts are currently being developed.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS foundation trusts will have other income streams in addition to standard NHS funding from the Treasury. [74551]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service foundation trusts may have limited access to other income streams, in a similar way to existing NHS trusts, in addition to standard NHS funding from Her Majesty's Treasury. Their prime purpose will be to treat NHS patients.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS foundation trusts will be able to develop services for private patients in addition to existing pay beds in their particular hospitals or clinics. [74552]

Mr. Hutton: Provision of clinical services to National Health Service patients will remain the principal objective for NHS foundation trusts. However, as is the case for existing NHS trusts, the new organisations will be able to treat private patients including foreign nationals who may live in the United Kingdom but are not eligible for NHS treatment.

The governance and regulatory framework that we are developing for NHS foundation trusts will ensure that appropriate controls are put in place to prevent these organisations from developing private business at the expense of developing services for NHS patients.

Foundation Trust Consultative Group

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Foundation Trust Consultative Group. [74553]

Mr. Hutton: To develop the policy on National Health Service foundation trusts, the Department has sought a wide range of specialist advice. In particular, since December 2001 Chief Executive Officers from NHS trusts that have achieved three stars in the NHS performance ratings have been consulted on a range of issues. Key topics for discussion have been development of new freedoms and policy development on NHS foundation trusts. We expect these arrangements to continue.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there to award, *(a)* Northamptonshire and *(b)* Norfolk and Norwich NHS trusts foundation trust status. [74554]

Mr. Hutton: On 25 July, the Department published *NHS Foundation Trusts: Eligibility Criteria and Timetable*. Amongst other criteria, applicant National Health Service trusts need to hold and retain three star status in the NHS performance ratings. Northamptonshire and Norfolk and Norwich NHS Trusts will not be eligible to apply for NHS foundation trust status this autumn because they did not achieve three star status in the NHS performance ratings announced in July 2002.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of his departmental officials are involved in work on foundation status for NHS trusts. [74555]

Mr. Hutton: At present, there are nine Departmental staff working full time on National Health Service foundation trusts. However, as policy on NHS foundation trusts embraces a wide range of issues a number of other staff are also contributing to the policy development as and when required.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Countryside Protection

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to finalise the details of the service delivery agreement in respect of protection of valuable countryside around towns and cities; and if he will make a statement. [74794]

Mr. McNulty: A service delivery agreement relating to all of the Office's public service agreements will be published later this year.

Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 16 May 2002 *Official Report*, column 800W, what information his Department has collated on the levels of under-occupancy in social housing in each borough in London; if he will list the financial compensation package and cash incentives available from each local authority in London to encourage tenants to move from an underoccupied property to more suitably sized accommodation; what assessment he has made of the impact in London of the good practice guidance on managing underoccupation published by his Department in April 2001; and what further action he plans to encourage local authorities in areas of high demand to develop a strategy for addressing underoccupancy. [74155]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally, and would only be provided at disproportionate cost; the information on financial compensation package and cash incentives available from each local authority in London to encourage tenants to move from an underoccupied property to more suitably sized accommodation will be available from the House of Commons library; the ODPM has not made an assessment of the impact in London of the good practice guidance on managing under-occupation; the ODPM has no firm plans to take further action to encourage local authorities in areas of high demand to develop a strategy for addressing underoccupancy.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total expenditure by his Department was on each estate action programme in the borough of Tower Hamlets since 1985; and what this was as a percentage of the total cost of each programme. [74146]

Mr. Raynsford: The records of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets show the total expenditure for each of the estate action projects in Tower Hamlets since 1985, and the Department's contribution as a percentage of the total cost of each project are:

Estate Action Schemes	*Total Cost of Project £m*	*Departmental contribution as % of Total cost*
Aberfeldy Estate	0.764	50
All Estates on Isle of Dogs	14.1	100
Anglsey House	0.378	100
Ashpark House	0.32	100
Bancroft	9.556	46
Barkentine	42.46	92
Barkentine 3	22.034	98
Barley Mow Estate	4.466	54
Bazely Estate	0.392	55
Bengal House	5.122	61
Berner Estate	1.766	100
Bethnal Green Estate	3.414	36
Birchfield House	1.301	62
Boundary Estate	1.964	63
Bow Bridge	0.16	100
Brinsley House Tarling East	0.88	100
British Street	2.295	12
Brownfield Estate	2.593	7
Brune House Complex	1.938	61
Burley House	0.6	100
Burnham Estate	0.971	68
Channel House-Ocean Estate	2.265	67
Chicksand Estate	2.418	77
Christchurch	0.511	45
Cleveland Estate	0.796	69
Coventry Cross East	0.23	100
Coventry Cross West	0.28	100
Cranbrook Estate	4.19	24
Cranford Cottages	0.12	100
Crossways	0.15	100
Cubitt Town-Thermopylae Gate	1.042	32
Digby Greenways	10.57	63
Dorian Estate all blocks in Stepney	0.307	100
Galleon House	4.192	78
Holland	0.712	97
Isle of Dogs	3.5	100
Jefferson Estate.Madison & 50	2.754	
John Scurr	4.807	46
Lefevre Walk	9.769	85
Leobold Building	9.544	43
Limehouse Fields	1.347	85
Limehouse Fields	0.705	71
Lincoln Estate	1.3	100
Locton	1.959	52
Maddocks House Tarling West	0.87	100
Malmesbury	0.5	100
Manchester Estate	2.685	98
Mansford	1.83	8
Martinu Estate	0.886	100
Mercers, mountmorres,	0.2	100
Midhurst House	0.32	100
Minerva	2.67	100
Monteith Estate	8.583	52
Newdieate House	0.304	100
Ocean	2.594	73
Ocean (Bothnia, Malaka, Tunis)	1.7	76
Ocean (Play Area)	0.44	9
Ocean Estate Security Works	0.219	100
Ocean(Muslim Prayer facilities)	0.44	9
Parkview/Crankbrook	0.66	100
Perring Estate	1.484	50
Ranwell East	0.356	100
Ranwell West	1.09	69
Ring House-Martineau Estate	2	100
Riverside Estate	0.343	100
Robin Hood Gardens	1.516	77
Robin Hood Gardens 2	0.52	100
Roche Estate	3.003	81
Rogers Estate	2.78	64
Roman Road North	0.677	83
Samuda Estate	2.395	45
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Samuda Estate. Hedley House	0.665	79
Samuda Housing Office	1.6	100
Sandhurst House	0.14	100
St Georges Estate	2.428	70
St John	1.844	85
St Peters	0.081	100
St Vincent	0.804	100
Studland House	0.5	100
Teviot Estate	1.07	49
Tredegar Road	0.45	100
Vaugham Estate	1.033	100
Wapping Estate	0	0
Watney market	19.027	85
Wellington	13.997	86
Winterton.	19.948	86
Total/Average	285.688	76

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many formal and official inter-ministerial meetings

his Department has held with the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [72715]

Mr. Leslie: Information is not available in the form requested. Ministers from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have frequent meetings with Ministers from the Scottish Executive, both formal and informal, covering a broad range of topics.

Flooding

Andy Burnham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to address problems with flooding in areas of new housing development. [72362]

Mr. McNulty: In July 2001 the Government published Planning policy guidance note (PPG) 25 *Development and flood risk*. This introduces a risk-based approach to planning for new development that gives priority to lower risk areas. Within high-risk areas priority is given to those areas that are already developed. Built development should be wholly exceptional within the functional flood plains that are essentially unobstructed by defences and existing development.

Those proposing new development are advised to carry out a flood-risk assessment. This should assess the risks of flooding to the development, its impact on flooding elsewhere (including the impact of increased run-off due to development) and identify any mitigation measures that may be required. Where flood defences or other mitigation is required because of a new development, its provision and future maintenance should be fully funded by the developer as part of the development.

In February 2002, DTLR published *Preparing for floods*. This contains interim guidance for improving the flood resistance of domestic and small business properties. It provides practical advice for existing property owners whose properties are at risk of flooding and for all those involved with construction of new properties or renovation of existing buildings in areas of flood risk. The Environment Agency, together with the Construction Industry Research and Information Association, has also produced guidance on temporary measures to protect against flooding (such as flood boards) and on what to do after a flood.

Green Belt

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on development on green belt land. [72377]

Mr. McNulty: Government policy on the Green Belt remains as set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 2, which states that protecting the countryside from encroachment is one of the main purposes of including land in the Green Belt. Since 1997 approximately 30,000 hectares of land have been earmarked for addition to the Green Belt.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 390**

SESSION 2001–2002

19th September—17th October 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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